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AN
INQUIRY
INTO THE
OBLIGATION
OF
RELIGIOUS COVENANTS
UPON
POSTERITY.

By GEORGE PAXTON,
MINISTER OF THE GOSPEL, KILMAURS.

I also will shew mine opinion.

ELIEU.

EDINBURGH:
PRINTED FOR ROSS & BLACKWOOD,
No. 29, *Parliament Close*,
BY T. ROSS & SONS, BELL'S WYND.

1801.



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A N

I N Q U I R Y, &c.

THE obligation of religious covenants upon posterity, is a doctrine which, for some time past, has excited considerable attention in the Secession church. While the greater part of professed Christians pay no regard to the subject; and while many, without attempting to answer the writings of covenanters, have, from principle, renounced the duty of religious vows; the friends of covenanting are divided in their sentiments concerning the obligation of these engagements. Some, while they acknowledge the morality of the duty, and the propriety of the practice, even in present circumstances, refuse that the covenants of our Fathers extend their obligation to succeeding generations. Their example, it is admitted, is for our imitation; and the brighter that example has been, and the nearer to our times, we are under the stronger obligation to follow it. But there are many who still believe in the obligation of religious covenants upon posterity. They are convinced, not only that it is a duty enjoined by the Law of God, and recommended to them by the example of their ancestors, to devote themselves with all possible solemnity to the Father of mercies; but, besides, that they were actually represented in the covenants of this church, at the Reformation, and are, together with every succeeding generation, bound, according to the general and moral tenor of these covenants, to promote the cause of God and truth. This doctrine was entertained by our covenanting fathers themselves, as appears from the first article of the Solemn League, in which they declare, that their design in entering into covenant was, "That they, and their posterity after them, might, as brethren, live in faith and love." The same sentiment appears in their defences of the covenanted reformation, and in their sermons, where they declare their firm persuasion, that no power on earth could absolve these nations from the oath which they had taken.

The Question is of considerable importance and difficulty; circumstances which recommend it the more to the inquisitive mind. The author has bestowed upon it all the attention in his power. It is not

his design to serve the interests of Party, but of Truth. Endeavouring to divest himself of every prepossession, he sought for truth, and embraced it without hesitation, on whatever side it appeared. The result of his reflections he now submits to the public; and will rejoice if it serve, in any degree, to promote the covenanted cause, which, he does not blush to own, he firmly believes to be, upon the whole, the cause of God.

Many members of the church to which he belongs, having often complained that the writings in defence of public vows are too complicated and prolix, he thought it might be of use to many who read but little, and understand less, to give a plain and summary view of the nature and warrants of public vows. This he has attempted in the two first sections of the first chapter. The observations are, in general, an abridgment of the Revd. Messrs. Graham and Morison's sermons on that subject; and are by no means intended to supersede, but to prepare the enquirer for a more profitable perusal of these excellent tracts, where, contrary to the insidious and unfounded assertions of a late anonymous writer, he will find not only the doctrine of public vows, but the errors abjured, and the historical facts referred to, distinctly and clearly explained.

In the remaining sections, the author has taken scripture and reason for his guide; and hopes that the principles which he has laid down correspond with the dictates of both. The view which he has taken, pleases himself, and seems to be the only one upon which the doctrine of descending obligation can be vindicated.

In the last chapter, the general doctrine of federal obligation is applied to the covenants of the British churches. In explaining the proceedings of the British covenanters, he followed the most approved authors he could obtain; and is not conscious of having overlooked or discoloured one single circumstance which belonged to his subject, but has narrated and reasoned according to the truth of history and the nature of things, to the best of his power. Highly as he venerates those great and excellent men, who trode the stage of public life in the two periods of reformation, and to whom, under God, we owe all that is dear to the friends of religion and liberty in these nations, he has not unduly screened the faults which he observed, or others pointed out, in their avowed principles and public management; but, at the same time, he reckoned it his duty, and it was to him one of the most pleasant parts of his task, to vindicate them from the unmerited reproaches with which their ungrateful country continues to load them. His efforts have been particularly directed to the vindication of their cove-
nants,

nants, which, he apprehends, have been much injured by the malevolence, the ignorance, or the rashness of their enemies.

Some, indeed, "do not suppose that the covenants of our fathers need any apology," and bitterly stigmatize those who appear in their behalf. Such blind admiration has done much to bring the good cause of a covenanted reformation into contempt. It clothes our fathers with infallibility: a prerogative which they never dreamed of arrogating, but would have spurned from them with the disdain of insulted honesty. Even the Apostle Paul claimed no blind obedience to his ministrations, but commended the Bereans for bringing the doctrines he taught to the test of scripture. More than one elaborate apology has been written for Christianity itself, by some of the greatest lights of the church. Had writers of this class examined and found no fault, they would have acted the part of reasonable creatures, even though they had been led to pronounce too favourable a sentence: but to assume, as they have done, that those Forms, composed by fallible men, are blameless, and to censure those who bring them to the law and to the testimony, in order to discover the truth, and hold it up to public view, is to do injury to our ancestors, to the cause in which they acted so conspicuous a part, and to disregard the authority of God himself, who commands us to try the spirits. The author counts it his honour to belong to a class of covenanters who never have surrendered their understandings into the hands of any set of men, however deserving; and, he hopes, never will; but continue to exercise their judgments according to the rule of scripture, in appreciating men and things. Whatever shall be the fate of this tract, the author will have the consolation to think, that he has "thrown in his mite of well intended endeavour" to illustrate a doctrine taught in the word of God, and a privilege bestowed by Christ on his church.

C H A P. I.

CONCERNING THE OBLIGATION OF RELIGIOUS COVENANTS UPON POSTERITY.

S E C T. I.

THE NATURE OF PUBLIC VOWS.

THE duty of Public Vows is frequently mentioned, and the Nature and Practice of it are clearly ascertained in the word of God. A covenant is a mutual agreement between two different parties. In a religious covenant, the parties are God and his people. When the church enters into covenant with God, they solemnly profess their belief in the covenant of grace revealed in the scriptures, and ratified by the precious blood of Christ; their dependence upon it alone for salvation; and their resolution to submit to the law of holiness, which it comprehends. The covenanter does nothing more in public, than every genuine believer frequently does in his closet. For, although there be many real Christians unacquainted with the duty and practice of public vows, and even unfriendly to them, there is not one but is a personal covenanter. Where is the saint who does not often retire from the world to pour out his soul before God; to express his cordial satisfaction with the plan of mercy through Jesus Christ; to declare his acceptance of the blessings it bestows; and his fixed resolution, by the grace of God, to live according to its laws?

A religious vow is a promise made to God, to be for his glory, to do his will, or to suffer for his sake. Therefore, God is a party in every vow. In a private vow, God and the individual are the only parties, and the sole witnesses. In a public vow, God and his people are not only the parties, but the individuals vowing are severally witnesses to the vows of one another. Consequently, in a public vow, there is an absolute necessity, that the articles vowed be openly declared and agreed to by all, and by every one in the presence of all.

An oath differs from a vow. The latter is a promise to God; the former is an appeal to the Searcher of hearts concerning the sincerity
with

with which the promise is made. There may be a promise, or vow, when there is no oath; and there may be an oath where there is no vow, either expressed or understood. In a vow, God is considered as a master, to whom the duty vowed is a debt; in an oath, as the witness and avenger.

Though vowing and swearing are generally conjoined in practice, they are distinct ordinances, and should never be confounded. A religious vow is not always accompanied with an oath. When a parent presents his child to baptism, he enters into a solemn vow, in the presence of the church, promising obedience to God, but there is no formal appeal to the Searcher of hearts to witness his sincerity.

When a religious vow is attended with an oath, there is nothing more solemn or extraordinary in that appeal, than when a person swears about the most common and ordinary concern of life. For an oath is, in all circumstances, the same, and admits of no degrees of solemnity, while the matters about which we swear may admit of many degrees of importance. The strange aversion, then, which many discover from swearing in confirmation of their religious profession, while they do not hesitate a moment to give their oath in a civil matter, arises either from ignorance or dislike. A religious, is, in no respect, more terrific than a civil oath. And, if it be lawful and necessary at one time, to annex an oath to any declaration of facts, or to any promise whatever, the same reasons make it lawful and necessary in the case of public vows, if they be lawful in themselves.

Public vowing has been improperly called an occasional duty. That is an occasional duty which returns at certain fixed periods, like the observation of the Sabbath; or which is staked down to a certain combination of circumstances. The first will not, and the second cannot be truly asserted concerning public vows. For, promises and precepts are directed to the church concerning this duty which have no respect to particular circumstances. The children of Israel entered into covenant at the giving of the Law. They renewed it at the death of Moses, on the banks of Jordan. They were never more prosperous nor more eminent for religion, than when they entered into covenant in the days of Aza: and they were not beginning, but rapidly advancing, in the work of reformation, when, during the government of Nehemiah, they entered into an oath to seek the Lord God of their fathers. Though there was something singular in the lot of the Jewish churches, there was nothing in that of the Macedonians, when "they gave their own selves to the Lord." Therefore, there is no season whatever in which public vows are improper, though there are peculiar seasons which

which call for them more loudly than others. They are, indeed, inseparable from the being, worship, and administrations of a church of Christ. There is no time when a church can be excused from a profession of attachment to the ways, as well as to the practice of Christianity. Now, every such profession is a public vow, addressed, at least virtually, to God, in the face of the world. A church, or particular congregation never meets for public worship, but the constituents socially and publicly vow themselves to the Lord, acknowledging their obligations, and professing their resolutions of new obedience.

Public vows are productive of many important advantages to the Christian, to the church, and to the world. In this institution, the covenanter has often enjoyed the presence of God in an eminent degree. He has felt it a powerful stimulus in the path of holiness. While it checked the wavering unsettled disposition of his mind, it provoked him to cautious and impartial enquiry. It guards the dearest interests of Christians and of churches. It serves to maintain the purity of divine ordinances. Public vows are the firmest foundations of mutual confidence among the members of the church. They inspire her with courage in the prospect of evil, and in the dreary night of adversity with fortitude and patience. The conduct of the Macedonian churches, in accompanying their pecuniary aid to the afflicted Christians in Judea with their solemn vows to God, shews that public covenanting is a healing balm which allays the griefs of our afflicted brethren in Christ Jesus. It rouses a sleeping world, and calls them to consider their ways. By this duty the church gives her enemies the strongest assurances of the purity of her principles, and the innocence of her conduct, and either disarms or renders them inexcusable. In fine, this duty is her strongest claim on the protection of Jehovah against the injustice of men; and furnishes the best argument which her children can use in her defence.

Violent as the opposition against the duty of public covenanting is, there is not a church of any denomination, but is, in fact, a covenanter. For every church gives an oral or written creed to the world, which contains a profession of her faith: and this is equivalent to a public vow. The difference between a public profession and a public vow, is not material. The language of the church's profession is, "We have given ourselves to the Lord, and do it still." The language of a public vow is this, "We do now give ourselves to the Lord." In a public profession we declare our belief to the world and to one another; in a public vow we only change the object, and make that declaration to God. Since every church of Christ, by her very name and constitution, professes

feßes her attachment to Christ, which is materially to engage in public covenanting, she may do this with every requisite formality, when it becomes necessary. If it be lawful materially to profess allegiance to a sovereign by submitting to his authority, it is certainly lawful to do so, in his presence, and before all his subjects; and when public confidence requires it, to add every possible solemnity.

S E C T. II.

PUBLIC VOWS AN ORDINANCE OF GOD.

THE duty of public covenanting rests upon the firm foundation of divine authority. If any person ask, Who hath required this of your hand?—It is the God of heaven; it is the Saviour and Redeemer of our souls. The following arguments are offered in proof of this assertion.

1. As public vows are absolutely necessary to a church state, so they must be agreeable to the will of God. Religious society is instituted by God, and therefore must be agreeable to him. But religious society, in its very nature, supposes a confession of faith in Christ, and profession of obedience to him; which we have seen is equivalent to a public vow.

2. It is the will of God that his people dwell together in unity; but unity cannot subsist without public vows; therefore they are agreeable to his will. The visible church is held together by no other tie than her relation to Christ. But there can be no union among Christians, if their relation to Christ be not visible and credible. A public profession of attachment to Christ, is the only sign which renders that relation visible to men. Therefore the scriptures join them together, and make them equally necessary to salvation. With the heart man believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. But if a profession exist at all, it must be public: and a public profession, it has been shown, is equivalent to a public vow.

3. Public vows are necessary to the communion of the church, and therefore must be lawful. They are the very foundation of communion, because they are included in the very idea of a church state, and of that visible union which connects the members of a visible church in one body, without which there can be no communion whatever. But, this is not all. Church communion is either that which the members

of

of a religious society have with God or with one another. As the first consists in a joint dedication of themselves to the Lord, as living sacrifices, in every act of public social worship, it is nothing else than a formal public vow. They say, and they say to God in the presence of each other, "The Lord is our portion." This is all that can be said in any vow; and it is made as publicly as any vow can be. The second, as it consists in an interchange of all the offices of love among church members, implies their attachment to Christ, professed and made public to one another; which is equivalent to a public vow of that society.

But, besides, covenanting is communion. One of the most essential branches of communion with God, both in heaven and in earth, lies in the joint and public acknowledgments which the redeemed offer up before the throne of their heavenly Father. It is also an eminent act of communion among believers; for by them they encourage one another in the good ways of the Lord.

4. Public vows are lawful, because God cannot be worshipped rightly without them, in any ordinance of Christ's appointment. In the due use of all the ordinances of Christ, there is a material and constructive vowing. Let the description which has been given of public vows, be applied to any one ordinance of Christ, and to the use which Christians ought to make of these institutions, and it will be found, that public vowing is implied in each of them without exception.

For example, Prayer is not more certainly a social duty, than it is a public vow, when it is socially performed. Christians who come to a worshipping assembly, not merely to hear prayer, but to join in that duty, "socially devote their own selves" to God. A praying assembly is a vowing assembly. If they do not present their persons, a living sacrifice to God, they do nothing. But what is done materially by divine approbation, may be done with every degree of solemnity, when circumstances make it necessary. In the due use of some ordinances there is a public formal vowing, as in Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

5. The duty which the churches owe to the world and to one another cannot be discharged, at certain seasons, without public covenanting. To exhibit and to hold fast the truth, to avow the Redeemer in the whole extent of his character, at every expence, is a duty which the Christian owes to the world. "Whosoever shall be ashamed of *me* and of my *words*, in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father, with the holy angels."

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Christian

Christian churches owe important duties to one another, which cannot always be discharged without public vows. Members of the same body, they are in duty bound not to suffer sin in one another, but to bear witness against the errors and defections into which any of them may fall, and to avow their attachment to bleeding truth, before God and man; and, if the circumstance promises to be attended with success in reclaiming the offending society, or in confirming the faithful, they ought to ratify their avowal, by a solemn appeal to the Searcher of hearts.

6. Public vows are expressly commanded in scripture. This duty is clearly implied in the first commandment: Thou shalt have no other gods before me *. This precept requires reasonable creatures to acknowledge God as the only true God and their God, in public as well as in private: and this is public vowing in the fullest extent of the terms.

The church is exhorted as a body, to "vow and pay unto the Lord†." The context shows that public covenanting is principally intended in this text. The mercies which the Jewish church are called to acknowledge by this duty, are not of a private, but of the most public nature. Now, if private mercies require private vows, in the very nature of things, public mercies demand public vows.

The last scripture which we shall mention from the Old Testament, is that celebrated passage of Isaiah: "In that day shall five cities in the land of Egypt speak the language of Canaan, and swear to the Lord of hosts.—They shall vow a vow unto the Lord, and shall perform it‡." This scripture undeniably refers to New Testament times; for it never was accomplished in any one age prior to the fulness of time. It is absurd to imagine that it received its fulfilment when Onias, a Jewish priest, about 149 years before Christ, built a temple at Heliopolis, in Egypt, in imitation of the temple at Jerusalem. For this undertaking was a heinous transgression of the divine law §. And, it were strange indeed, if the sin of the church were the accomplishment of the promise. This passage contains all the formalities of public covenanting. "They shall vow a vow unto the Lord:" and this vow, they shall confirm by solemn oath; "they shall swear unto the Lord of hosts." They do all this in the most public manner; "five cities" join in giving themselves to the Lord. This is not to be understood of their simply professing the truth; for their profession is expressed by another term exceedingly emphatical—"They shall speak the

* Exod. xx. 3.

† Pl. lxxii. 2.

‡ Isa. ix. 18, 21.

§ Lev. xvii. 8. 9. Josh. xxii. 1 Kings viii.

the language of Canaan." To this profession is added something more solemn—"They shall vow a vow unto the Lord, and swear to the Lord of hosts." It is true this text is not a precept but a promise; but every promise contains a precept. God never promises grace to do what his authority never required.

On this point the New Testament coincides with the Old. The adversaries of public vows, demand with an air of triumph, "Where is the appointment of covenanting in the New Testament?" We answer, The Old Testament is still the rule of our faith and practice; and since the duty of vowing to God is not abrogated in the New, it is still to be observed. But waving this argument, we will retort the question, and demand, Where is the appointment for infant Baptism in the New Testament? Where is your warrant in the New Testament, for admitting women to the Lord's table? Let the adversaries of covenanting point out an express precept or example in either of these cases if they can. Your warrant for infant Baptism and admission of women to the Supper is implied—Our warrant for public vows is something more. For we have both precept and example for this duty, in the New Testament. We have shown that it is contained in the first precept of the Moral Law, which is the rule of duty in every dispensation. Now, the New Testament dispensation establishes the Law*. Besides, our Lord's exposition of the Third commandment contains a warrant for this duty: "Ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths†." With this explanation our Lord does not insinuate the least dissatisfaction, but only shows, in the subsequent verses, that there are various other ways, in which it may be violated.

We shall only add, that the Apostle exhorts the Romans to that duty with great earnestness; "I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service‡." This New Testament church is entreated to give themselves to the Lord, to serve him with the whole heart, and in opposition to the sinful customs of their days, to make his law the rule of their conduct. But, if this was a duty incumbent upon the Romans on general grounds, it must be a duty incumbent upon the churches of Christ at all times. And if circumstances render every possible solemnity requisite, this commandment renders the duty clothed with all its solemnities indispensably necessary.

* Mat. v. 17. † Verse 33. ‡ Rom. xii. 1.

7. The approved example of the church in the Apostolic and succeeding ages establish the lawfulness of public vows. None who have read their bibles will call in question the practice of public covenanting under the Old Testament. Public vows, in that age, belonged neither to the ceremonial nor to the judicial law of Moses; for Abraham was a covenanter before circumcision itself was instituted; and Jacob vowed a vow at Bethel many ages before the Mosaic economy commenced; and Stephen declares that it was with the church, not with the state, or nation of Israel, that the angel treated from the top of Sinai *. In all ages, covenanting is purely a religious duty, emanating from the Moral Law.

The Apostolic age affords us several examples of this duty. The churches of Macedonia, Gentile churches, that were never under Moses, practised it with the express approbation of an inspired Apostle, pronouncing it to be "by the will of God." If there be any thing certain in Revelation, it is indisputable that these churches entered into a public vow, according to the will of God. What language more expressive of this exercise could even an inspired Apostle have chosen? "They gave their own selves to the Lord, according to the will of God." This proceeding cannot refer to their first association for public worship, for they had been a regular organised church for some time; nor to the communion of the Lord's Supper, which it was quite customary for the churches often to celebrate. The Apostle had no reason to be surprised at what he had long and often witnessed. But this was something above his expectation, yet according to the will of God. The language is the same which the scripture uses for public covenanting, therefore it could be nothing else.

But this is not the only example of covenanting in the age of inspiration. During our Lord's humiliation, when many had forsaken him, he put a question to the twelve, "Will ye also go away?" Peter spake the sentiments of the whole in a public vow. "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life; and we *believe* and are *sure*, that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God †." This declaration hath not only the essentials of a vow, but even the very form. The declaration is directed to Christ himself; it contains a dedication of themselves to him, for time and eternity, as the Lord of eternal life: and it is attended with a solemn profession of their faith concerning the character of Christ in whom they believed. No covenanter could say more, nor does he say any thing else than Peter did.

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* Acts vii. 32. † John vi. 62, 69.

We have another example of public vows from the lips of the same confessor, after the resurrection of Christ. Peter had shamefully deserted, and wickedly denied his Lord. At his restoration, the Saviour drew him to a solemn public vow of his love to the Master whom he had lately denied, confirmed by the solemnity of an oath. "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, *Yea*, Lord! thou *knowest* that I love thee," &c.* Here is both a formal public vow, and a formal public appeal to the omniscience of Christ concerning his sincerity. It was, indeed, the act of Peter alone, because none of the other disciples shared in his guilt. But, if they had been associates with him in the sin of denying their Lord, the same reason would have pled for extending the question to all, that they might have jointly professed their love to Christ, in a social as well as in a public vow.

Since the Apostolic age, covenanting has been the practice of the churches, in all the several periods of the Christian dispensation. The primitive churches received none into communion but those who made a public profession of their adherence to the creed of the society, and bound themselves by oath to be steadfast in the faith. The truth of this assertion appears not only from the writings of the first Christians, but also from the testimony of heathen authors who lived at the same time. In the beginning of the second century, and only twelve years after the death of the Apostle John, Pliny, a Roman governor, and a person of undoubted credit, in an epistle to the emperor Trajan, giving an account of the general practice of the Christian churches, has these remarkable words: "They affirmed, the whole of their guilt or their error, was, that they met on a certain stated day, before it was light, and addressed themselves in a form of prayer to Christ, as to some God, binding themselves by a SOLEMN OATH, not for the purposes of any wicked design; but never to commit any fraud, theft, or adultery, never to falsify their word, nor deny a trust when they should be called upon to deliver it up." But if this was the general practice of the church only twelve years after the death of John, it must have been the general practice during his time, and by his direction. Justin Martyr, in his second apology, written about the year 160, declares, "That Baptism was given only to those (he speaks of adult Baptism) who, to the confession of their faith, added a vow to live according to their knowledge." Fifty years later, Tertullian, inveighing against shows, and theatrical representations, insists, "These things belong to the

* John xxi. 15, 17.

the pomp of the devil, against which we *swore* at the sealing of our Creed." Jerom also assures us that solemn covenanting preceded Baptism: "We enter into covenant with the Sun of Righteousness; and engage that we shall serve him." This practice continued from the times of the Apostles till those of Gregory Nazianzen, who composed a solemn covenant, which he swore, and published to the world, as the strongest testimony he could give against the Arian heresy. "By the eternal word I swear—I solemnly swear, that I will never embrace any evil opinions repugnant to the truth," &c. Subscription of religious covenants in those days was as common as vowing and swearing. "Thy hand writing," said an ancient Father, "is registered not only on earth, but in heaven also." Covenanting was also a term of communion in the primitive churches; for it incontrovertibly appears from their writings, that no adult was admitted to Baptism without vowing, swearing, and subscribing.

During the dark ages of Popery, the Evangelical churches in the vallies of Piedmont, who began to separate from the Romish church in the beginning of the ninth century, published their confession of faith in 1120, in opposition to the errors and abominations of Antichrist: and this is equivalent to a public vow. In the year 1532, they gave a new statement of their testimony, and ratified it by their solemn oaths. In 1603, they renewed their declaration, and addressed it to all the Protestant churches, promising before the whole world, to live in the doctrines of the holy scriptures, and if necessary to seal their testimony with their blood*. In like manner, the followers of the celebrated Hufs in Bohemia, on the 11th November, 1571, drew up a bond of union, and confirmed it by oath.

The Reformation no sooner commenced, than the Protestants swore and subscribed bonds of association and confessions of faith. In 1530 was the famous league of Smalkald framed, in which the churches of Germany publicly recognized the Reformation as the cause of God, by solemn oath to the Most High. On the 20th July, 1537, the capital articles of the Christian religion were sworn by the Senate and people of Geneva: and this bond extended to Berne and Lausanne in Switzerland. In the churches of Holland, those who were admitted to the Lord's table made a public profession of their faith before all the congregation; and engaged by promise and covenant to continue in the faith, and lead sober and righteous lives. The churches in Hungary and Transylvania prescribed an oath to be taken by the ministers of religious,

* Moreland's Gift.

ligion, and by such as were converted from error to the truth of the gospel. The reformed churches in France have added their example to that of all the pure churches of Christ. For, in the year 1619, their deputies met in their National Synod, and avowed their attachment to the truth, in a covenant ratified by their solemn oaths. The covenants of the British churches are sufficiently known. From Europe, the practice of covenanting passed over into the wildernesses of America. The settlers who arrived at Salem in 1629, on the 6th of August, a day set apart for fasting and prayer, formed themselves into a church by a confession of faith, and by entering into covenant with God. This deed was several times renewed with every solemnity.

From this brief statement, it appears, that the duty of public and solemn covenanting rests upon the broad and sure foundations of scripture, reason, and the practice of all the churches in their best days, ever since the Redeemer had a church among men.

It is a distinct ordinance of God; and therefore it is a daring impeachment of the knowledge and wisdom of the Divine Lawgiver to say, that it is unnecessary, or superseded by other institutions. The institution and approved practice of it says, that God judged it necessary, and that he will not hold him innocent who neglects or despises it.

Though vowing to God is implied in other ordinances, it is not superseded by them; for why then did God require and honour the distinct performance of it with his unequivocal approbation? Other ordinances contain only an *implicit*, but this ordinance is intended to give an explicit acknowledgment of all the truths and institutions of Christ. Its primary and principal design is altogether different from that of any other ordinance; therefore it never can be superseded by the other institutions of Christ. No one ordinance can answer the primary intention of another; for the Lawgiver is infinitely wise, and does nothing in vain. In Baptism there is a solemn and public vowing to Christ, as well as in the Lord's Supper. Yet the one does not supersede the other,—neither can these institutions supersede the duty of covenanting.

Public vows add nothing to the obligation of the Moral Law. And what additional force do civil oaths impart to God's Law? If it be unlawful or needless to swear a religious covenant, because it cannot increase the obligation of the Divine Law, it must, for the very same reason, be unlawful and unnecessary to swear in civil affairs. And is it to be supposed that God requires his church to take his name in vain? If a religious oath is vain now, it was always so: for the Moral Law is the same at all times. Therefore, when the holy Majesty of Heaven required his people to swear by his name, he commanded them to

to profane it ! But, though a religious oath does not encrease the obligation of the Law, it brings home that obligation upon conscience, awakening the callous mind to a sense of duty ; and it satisfies society concerning the ingenuity of the swearer. Must this important duty be discarded, because it does not accomplish an end for which it was never intended ? Happy is that man, and blessed, who, in the spirit of a little child, receives with humility and thankfulness, the institutions of Jesus, as he gives them, for of such is the kingdom of heaven.

S E C T. III.

THE NATURE OF COVENANT OBLIGATION.

THE parts of a proper covenant are two, a Condition and a Promise. The first is a term which one of the parties undertakes to perform as a consideration for which he is to enjoy the benefits of the covenant : the latter is the assurance which the other party gives to perform such an act, as is agreed on, when the condition is fulfilled. The contracting parties are in duty bound to fulfil their engagements ; which is the obligation of a covenant. By this, they have mutually a right to insist upon the performance of their engagements, and in case of failure, to call the offender to account, and to inflict upon him the deserved punishment.

Breach of covenant naturally excites resentment, the sentiment which most immediately and directly prompts us to punish. " This passion prompts us to desire not only that the culprit should be punished, but that he should be punished by our means and upon account of that particular injury which he had done to us. Resentment cannot be fully gratified unless the offender is not only made to grieve in his turn, but to grieve for that particular wrong which we have suffered from him. He must be made to repent and be sorry for this very action, that others through fear of the like punishment, may be deterred from the like offence †." The righteous displeasure of God produces effects which bear some distant resemblance to these. " I will give the men that have transgressed my covenant, which have not performed the words of the covenant which they had made before me, when they cut the calf in twain, and passed between the pieces thereof, I will even give

* Smith's Theory of Moral Sent.

give them into the hand of their enemies, and into the hand of them that seek their life ; and their dead bodies shall be for meat unto the fowls of the heaven, and to the beasts of the earth *."

The primary and strongest obligation of a religious covenant arises from the Moral Law. From this all other obligations flow ; to this they are subordinate ; and upon this they depend. It is neither lawful to take nor to keep an oath which requires us to do what the law of God forbids, or to neglect what it requires. To take an oath of this kind is to be guilty of sin ; and to keep it is to persevere in wickedness. The Law of God lays a primary obligation upon conscience ; but that which a voluntary oath imposes is only secondary and subordinate. The former binds men to duty whether they choose it or not ; in the latter, men spontaneously bind themselves. We are bound to obey the Divine Law, previous to all enquiry, and though we should never take the trouble to examine what it demands ; though it enjoins no duty which the diligent and humble Christian may not ascertain and understand ; but we have a right to refuse our assent to the articles of a voluntary engagement, till we have judged of their meaning and import.

The obligation of the Moral Law admits of no addition, but there may be superadded obligations of another and subordinate kind. Of this sort are the ties of gratitude, and the duty arising from voluntary oaths and covenants. These obligations, indeed, flow from the obligation of the Divine Law, and are contained in it. We are required to do to others as we would have them do to us, which comprehends the debt of gratitude. The Third commandment enjoins us to perform our federal engagements, and the Ninth to act consistently with our professions. Now, if a person is under all these obligations to promote the happiness of his neighbour, but neglects his duty, his sin will be aggravated by the additional breach of these commandments. If an Oath or Covenant lay no additional obligation upon the conscience, they are useless, and are neither to be required nor taken. If there be no additional obligation, perjury infers no additional criminality. But, these assertions few will be disposed to make ; for it is a truth recognized by all nations, that in every case wherein we are under a primary obligation from the Law of God, we may, as occasions require, come under the subordinate obligation of an oath †.

In every covenant ratified by oath, there is a double obligation originating in a twofold Right, Divine and Human. This obligation re-

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* Jer. xxxiv. 18, 20.

† Anderson's Essays.

seems its source, and consists of a natural obligation, which binds by the force of the Divine Law, and of a civil, which derives its power from human laws. But, besides the distinction of obligation arising from the origin, the Object, or debt which the jurant engages to pay, furnishes another. The debt contracted by a covenant is twofold; the debt of *Duty*, which every one is bound to perform by the precept of the law; and the debt of *Punishment*, which, by the function of the law, every one who neglects his duty is bound to suffer. According to the first sense, the mutual offices of love are called debts, because the law of God requires them: Owe no man any thing, but to love one another *. In the last sense, sins are called debts; the wages of sin is death †. But, the last is contracted only when the first remains unpaid; for if a person do what the law requires, he is under no obligation to suffer the punishment which it threatens to inflict. With this twofold debt, a double obligation also corresponds, and of precisely the same denomination, *viz.* an obligation to duty, and an obligation to punishment. The first of these obligations, however, is prior and stronger than the last, both in its own nature and in the design of the law. For it is tyranny, and not right, to punish where no fault has been committed. Therefore it is the primary, direct, and spontaneous design of the Law, to impose an obligation to duty and obedience; but it imposes only a secondary, indirect, and hypothetical obligation to punishment ‡.

To these some add an obligation from example: but example does not constitute a new or additional obligation; it only aggravates the punishment of the guilty. It has been shown that the obligation of a covenant is distinct from that of the Moral Law, and superadded to it; for a covenant imposes an obligation, where the law of God leaves man at liberty to do as he pleases. Jephthah was bound by the Moral Law to perform to the Lord his vows; but no precept required him to offer up for a burnt-offering whatsoever came forth of the doors of his house to meet him, when he returned in peace from the children of Ammon. Before his vow he was free to do as he pleased; but when he had opened his mouth to the Lord, he could not go back. But example does not, like an oath or covenant, impose a distinct and separate duty; it does not oblige a man where the Law of God has left him at liberty; it aggravates our breach of a moral precept, but can do no more. If our oath or covenant be not contrary to the Divine Law, we are bound to obey; but in many cases we may, without blame, refuse to follow a laudable example.

* Rom. xiii. 8.

† Ch. vi. 23.

‡ Sanderfon de Juramenti, &c.

example. The man who bravely puts the robber to flight, and saves his money, commands the approbation of his fellow-citizens, and holds up a noble example for their imitation; but he who, rather than risk his life, quietly parts with his property, incurs no blame. We cannot neglect or despise an approved example of scripture, without exposing ourselves to the anger of God, because he commands us to be followers of them, who through faith and patience, are now inheriting the promises. But where the divine Authority is silent, we may follow our own inclinations, and none have a right to controul us by force. From these observations it appears, that if the obligation of religious covenants be confined to the original and immediate covenanters, posterity has no more concern in them than in any other duty which is enjoined by the authority of God, and recommended by the frequent observation of religious progenitors. Upon this supposition, it is improper to speak of the Obligation of our Covenants National and Solemn League. Covenanting is a duty required by the word of God, and therefore obligatory upon us, and all the children of men; but the Covenants of our Fathers, considered as their *act*, impose no obligation upon us whatever, and affect us in no other way than their praying, praising, hearing, and communicating. The covenanting at Horeb, or at Jordan, is as obligatory upon us, and as interesting as that which took place in this country at the Reformation; excepting, that the last is but as yesterday, while the first is removed towards the beginning of time. And there is as much propriety in acknowledging the obligation of the Old Testament covenants upon us, so far as they were of a moral and general nature, or of the religious covenants of any other people whatever, as of those into which our fathers entered.

S E C T IV.

OF FEDERAL REPRESENTATION.

WHEN the constituent members of a religious society devote themselves and their posterity to God in a covenant of duty, the obligation descends from one generation to another, as long as that particular church endures. In a proceeding of this kind, the posterity of the original covenanters are truly covenanters in the loins of their fathers. This is not mere assertion, nor is it a figment resembling some of those legal devices, which nations have adopted for their security: for in

scripture, the deed of an ancestor is by the inspired writer ascribed to the posterity, as if they had been actually present, and taking a decided part in the business. “And as I may so say, Levi also, who received tithes, paid tithes in Abraham. For he was yet in the loins of his father when Melchisedec met him*.” In these verses, the Apostle asserts, that the whole tribe of Levi, who by the law received tithes, did themselves virtually pay tithes to the king of Salem, in and through Abraham, as their common father and representative. For Levi and all his descendents were comprehended in Abraham, not only as their natural, but also as their covenant father, who had received the promises for them as well as for himself; otherwise, for what purpose does the Apostle mention Abraham’s having the promises†? And it is as easy to understand how our fathers represented us in their religious covenants, as how Levi paid tithes in the loins of his progenitor. As in many civil contracts, the heir, though unborn, or still a minor, is considered as present and consenting to the deed of his father, and is accordingly bound to fulfil the contract when he comes of age, and enters upon the possession, so are the descendents of covenanting ancestors, virtually present, and engaging with them in that solemn act of worship. An obligation of the same nature and extent, bind the fathers and their succeeding race. The same force may be justly exerted upon both to prevent them from breaking their engagements, or to compel them to return to their duty, or to punish their perfidy. This observation, perhaps, does not fully apply to oaths. If a man purchase an estate, and engage upon oath to pay the price in six months, but die before that time, his heir who enters upon the possession, is bound to fulfil the bargain; for the heir is rightly bound to pay the just debts of his predecessor, to whose goods he succeeds; and it is perfectly just that the inheritance descend with all its burdens. The heir, however, in the opinion of some casuists, is not bound by the oath which was taken by the deceased. “If he refuse to fulfil the engagement of his father, he is indeed unjust, but not perjured. The reason is, an oath is a personal bond, and lays an obligation only upon the conscience of the individual who swears it. But in personal matters no one is bound without his own consent. If it be said, that a man, by his own personal act can bind himself and his heirs, as is done every day in civil agreements, and, therefore, that he may bind his heirs by his own oath, especially if he declare, that he swears in his own name, and in that of his posterity. To this it is answered, That the cases are not the same. Because a spiritual obligation, which is in the conscience, must

* Heb. vii. 9, 10.

† See Dr. Guyse.

must be personal; as every man's conscience is his own property, and cannot be transferred to his heir. But a temporal obligation follows a temporal matter, which, as it may be transferred to another, can consequently lay an obligation upon another person. The heir then, is bound by the equity of the bargain, not by the obligation of the oath which his father swore *." But though it were admitted, that the obligation of an oath terminates with the life of the swearer, it will by no means follow, that the obligation of that covenant, which the extinguished oath was employed to ratify, ceases with the life of the covenanter too. Were civil society to admit that the obligation of a covenant cannot descend to posterity, the most fatal consequences to its peace, and even to its very existence, would follow. An oath and a covenant are quite distinct; and so are their obligations. Therefore, as an oath is not essential to a religious covenant, though the obligation of the former end with the life of the swearer, that circumstance can make no change in the obligation of the latter.

But there is some reason to believe that even the obligation of an oath takes hold of posterity as well as that of a covenant. The Patriarch Joseph engaged his brethren by oath to carry up his bones from Egypt to the promised land; and Moses, a hundred and forty years afterwards, religiously fulfilled the obligation. The sacred historian not satisfied with recording the fact, assigns the reason, and clearly recognizes the obligation of the agreement between Joseph and the children of Israel, and makes particular mention of the solemn oath by which the covenant was ratified: "And Moses took the bones of Joseph with him; for he had straitly sworn the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you; and ye shall carry up my bones away hence with you." But why does Moses use this language, if he did not believe that the obligation of that oath was now in force? None of the persons were alive who took this oath, when Israel began their journey to Canaan; for it is written, "And Joseph died, and all his brethren, and all that generation." According to the opinion we are calling in question, that oath must then have been extinguished; and yet Moses mentions it as the only reason that he carried with him the bones of the deceased Patriarch.

The address of Moses to Israel on the banks of Jordan, besides affording a clear proof that the obligation of a religious covenant descends to posterity, gives some reason to suspect that the obligation of an oath also affects the progeny of the swearer. "Neither with you only do I make this covenant and this oath; but with him that standeth

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* Sanderson de Joram.

eth here with us this day before the Lord our God, and also with him that is not here with us this day *." All the congregation of Israel were now present, young and old, men and women, high and low, and the stranger that was in their camp, from the hewer of wood to the drawer of water. Those, then, who were not there with them, could be none other than their future progeny ; but with them also, Moses, the inspired prophet of God, declares the covenant was made : and to them accordingly the obligation must extend. But he distinguishes the oath from the covenant which it ratified ; and expressly says, that it was made with them and with their children ; but this could not be true, if its obligation died with the immediate swearer.

On this doubtful point, however, we shall not insist. But, though it be granted, that the obligation of an oath is personal and incommunicable, the descending obligation of a covenant is not in the least affected ; the doctrine for which we plead remains in all its force. Sanderfon himself allows, that the obligation of a covenant descends to the posterity of the covenanter, at the very same time that he insists on the impossibility of an oath obliging the conscience of any person but the swearer himself. Nay, by allowing that an oath dies with the swearer, the argument in favour of a descending federal obligation is illustrated and confirmed, as it is disencumbered of a strong objection which is frequently started, " Why are religious covenants renewed, if their obligation descends entire ?" The answer is now easy, and we think completely satisfactory. In a covenant ratified by oath there are two distinct obligations ; the obligation of the covenant itself, which the above writer calls its Equity, and which, according to him, binds the children or heirs of the contractor ; and the obligation of the oath by which it is confirmed. The last obligation terminates with the life of the swearer, and only the first descends to his posterity. Now, as God requires his people not only to vow, but also to swear, the Lord liveth, as we have already proven, posterity are bound, as well as their fathers, to ratify their religious covenant by solemn oath ; and therefore, to renew the Deed of their covenanting ancestors, becomes a reasonable and important duty.

Persons become representatives by the choice of those whom they represent ; or by the appointment of the lawful superior of both. Ancestors must become the representatives of their succeeding race, not by choice, but by appointment. The laws of every country, directed by the light of nature and the imperious wants of society, appoint the father to represent his child in civil contracts. The God of Israel appointed

* Deut. xxix. 14, 15.

pointed Abraham to "be the heir of the world," the Lord and Chief and Representative of the believing world, Jews and Gentiles, to whom the promise was first made, and from whom it was transmitted to the succeeding generations of his natural and spiritual seed, according to the covenant which was made with him. In pursuance of the promise to Abraham, He appointed the congregation at Horeb to represent in their church covenant, all the succeeding generations of that people. In the same manner, it is conceived, and by the same high authority, the radical congregation of every church, covenanting with God, is the representative of all their successors.

When we assert that our fathers represented their posterity in their religious covenants, we only mean, that they were the first of that society who expressed their assent to the promise of spiritual and heavenly blessings, by solemn covenant; and this promise is transmitted from them to us, according to their covenant, as far as it agrees with the word of God. This differs entirely from the representation of Adam. He was appointed by God the federal head of his posterity, in the Covenant of Works, to fulfil the condition of it in their room and stead; but a religious vow imposes no condition whatever, neither upon the representatives nor their successors. The posterity of Adam were bound to stand and fall with him; but our fathers never could and never meant to impose upon us an obligation of this kind. It would have been presumptuous wickedness in the posterity of Adam to examine whether there was any thing faulty in the Covenant of Works, to receive with adoring submission was their duty; but the same rule is given to us, as to our fathers—Search the scriptures—believe not every spirit, but try the spirits, judge for yourselves, and reject whatever you find in their faith and practice discordant with the word of God. Adam undertook both for himself and his posterity; but our fathers undertook only for themselves, and their obedience was never intended to supersede in any manner or degree that of their descendants. The latter are still bound to perform in their own persons all that the former engaged to in theirs.

But, though covenanting ancestors perform no condition in the room of their posterity, God, before whose eyes are all the future generation of men, made his covenant with both. He ordained that the obligation of the covenant should equally reach the fathers and the children, and subject them to punishment for their neglect or breach of vows. The representation of the people of Israel was precisely of this kind. Their illustrious progenitor Abraham fulfilled no condition for his posterity, but received the covenant in the form of a free promise,

mise, and by faith consented to it. This covenant was so free, that it is called "the giving of the promise;" because, though the promises had been given to the Patriarch before, they were now more fully and clearly revealed than they had ever been.

When God renewed this covenant with the congregation of Israel at Sinai, which was the first particular application of the general covenant made with the common father of all the faithful, that people performed no condition even for themselves, but received the promise of God, and at his command vowed obedience to his law. Hear how the Lord himself represents this covenant between himself and Israel; "Thou hast avouched the Lord this day to be thy God, and to walk in his ways, and to keep his statutes, and his commandments and judgments, and to hearken to his voice. And the Lord hath avouched thee this day to be his peculiar people, as he hath promised thee, and that thou shouldst keep all his commandments."

This was a covenant of gratitude and thankfulness. It by no means required the children of Israel to yield obedience to the law of Moses as the condition upon which they were to inherit the land of Canaan. Had this been the requisition of the covenant, it would have been a covenant of works, by which the reward would have been reckoned not of grace but of debt, and the free and absolute promise to Abraham, rendered of no effect. But, says the Apostle, "The covenant that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of no effect." The promise of the land of Canaan to the Israelites, and the promise of eternal life, are alike in this respect, that both are absolutely free and unconditional. The Lord made a covenant with Abraham, saying, "Unto thy seed will I give this land*." Not a word is spoken of a condition to be performed by Abram, or by his seed. The Israelites enter into the land of Canaan by believing the promise of God, in the same manner as a sinner enters into the heavenly inheritance. They heard the divine promise, and were persuaded that the Lord would not fail to put his people in possession of the good land. Therefore they professed their faith in him, and avowed their desire and resolution, in the strength of his promise, to express their thankfulness to their God and Redeemer, by a cheerful obedience to all his commandments. This was the exercise which Moses intended by these words; "Ye have avouched the Lord to be your God, to walk in his ways."

Nor, is it any real objection to this view of Israel's covenanting, that the outward dispensations of Providence towards them were according

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* Gen. xv. 13.

to the regard they had to their covenant with the Lord ; that they flourished in prosperity and peace, while they persevered in dutiful obedience to Jehovah, and suffered the desolating calamities of war, famine, and pestilence, when they rebelled against him. We are by no means to think that because the Lord chastises his people for their disobedience, by depriving them of worldly, and even of spiritual comforts, that their obedience is the condition or tenure on which they enjoy these comforts. The supposition is contrary to the nature of the everlasting covenant, by which believers receive all the blessings of time and eternity, as the gift of free and sovereign grace : nor can any work they do, or any quality they possess, add, in the least degree, to the right which the great and precious promises of the covenant give them to those blessings. This was the case under the Old Testament no less than under the New. We learn from the words of Moses that the grant of Canaan to Israel was absolutely free : “ Not for thy righteousness, nor for the uprightness of thine heart, dost thou go in to possess the land ; but for the wickedness of these nations THE LORD THY GOD doth drive them out from before thee ; and that he may perform the word which the Lord sware unto thy fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” The Lord dealt with these nations as moral agents, according to the demerit of their crimes ; but with Israel as church members, according to the gracious promises of the everlasting covenant *.

As the people of Israel at Sinai and Jordan did not, in any respect, acquire, by their obedience, the enjoyment of the promised land for themselves ; so they did not perform any condition for their posterity. Many of the covenanting Israelites came short of their rest through unbelief ; yet their children who avoided their rebellion, entered into Canaan. But if they had been required to perform any condition for their descendants, they must have stood and fallen together. The sin of that people affected only the guilty individuals. The carcases of the rebellious fell in the wilderness, but the rest of the congregation remained safe under the protection of God. The language of Moses to Israel, at the renovation of their covenant, corroborates these observations. He does not require them to do something in the name of the people of Israel who were not present on that occasion ; but says expressly, that the covenant was made with them who were not there, as well as with them who were present †. As a king bestows an estate upon one of his subjects, and his heirs and successors for ever ; requiring, as the only return, that he and they should serve him with inviolable fidelity ;

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* Abderdon's Essays.

† Deut. xxix. 5.

delity; so God, of his royal bounty, gave the land of Canaan, the type of the heavenly inheritance, to Israel, commanding them, as a testimony of their gratitude, to walk in his ways. And thus the Promise or Covenant made with Abraham is to them and to their children, and not to them only, but in the same manner to the Gentiles, who at that time were far from God, and from his covenant, even as many of them as the Lord our God should graciously call to the faith and fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ.

S E C T. V.

ORIGIN OF THE RIGHT WHICH ANCESTORS HAVE TO REPRESENT THEIR POSTERITY IN A RELIGIOUS COVENANT.

THE Right of Ancestors to bind their posterity by their lawful engagements, arises from the law of Nature, and is coeval with the creation of man. For the notion that ancestors have a right to bind their posterity has generally prevailed in the world. Now it is difficult, if not impossible, to account for the general prevalence of this doctrine, without allowing that it hath some foundation in truth and reason. Admitting, however, that the notion first sprung from mere fancy and imagination, that it was quickly adopted and improved by artful men, to answer their own purposes, and so became universal; yet it should seem strange, that an infinitely wise and good God should in no age interpose his authority to undeceive men upon a point of so interesting a nature. This doctrine influences the faith and practice of men in the simplest state of society, when they act according to the genuine and undisguised impulse of their nature. We have a proof of this in the covenant which Abimelech and Phichol, the captain of his host, made with Abraham, and afterwards with Isaac. It is almost needless to observe, that it does not affect the argument, whether these Philistines were the same or different persons *. In this covenant, Abimelech and Phichol were the representatives of their nation, stipulating for their safety, and consequently, engaging for the safety of Abraham, Isaac, and their people, even to the third generation. Since Abimelech plainly acted for his people, for kings had not learned to speak of themselves in the plural number, and since the term of duration is, in the first covenant, extended to the third generation, and unlimited in the second, the children of the contracting

* Gen. l. 25. comp. Exod. xiii. 19.

tracting parties must have been comprehended in their intention, and laid under the same obligation as themselves. And, to this day, the rudest tribes act upon the same principle, and enter into covenants for themselves and their posterity. But this principle becomes more visible, and is better defined, as society advances in knowledge and refinement.

We have already mentioned the covenant, by which the dying Joseph engaged his brethren to carry up his bones from Egypt to the land of promise*. He, with the authority of a patriarch and a deliverer, assumed that generation to be the representative of their succeeding race; and they consented to act in their name; for Joseph well knew, that the persons of whom he took the oath, would, every one, be gathered to their fathers, long before the deliverance of their nation from Egyptian bondage took place: and so it actually happened; for "all that generation died" before the appearance of Moses. This instance furnishes several important facts. A congregation of Israel, without any delegation, act in the name of their posterity, undertaking that the bones of Joseph should be carried up with their people from the house of bondage. Their posterity acknowledge the obligation, and do as their fathers had engaged. The children did not quarrel with their ancestors for bringing them under this yoke; nor endeavour to excuse themselves from the seemingly idle labour of transporting a dead man's bones, through so tedious and dangerous a journey, because they had no voice in choosing their representatives, nor in the agreement with Joseph, and because an oath is a personal obligation, and cannot affect the descendants of the swearer. Unacquainted with the refinements of modern casuistry, Moses and Israel thought only of fulfilling the covenant of their fathers.

When Israel took possession of Canaan, the Gibeonites, to secure their lives and property, imposed upon the heads of the tribes, and enticed them into a covenant, which was ratified with the oath of God. Although this treaty was contrary to the command of Heaven, and highly disagreeable to the congregation, it was not to be broken. The obligation which arose from a positive precept, must yield to one more sacred still, which owes its existence to his nature and perfections; and the inclinations of the people must submit to their duty. After the lapse of many ages, Saul, in a paroxysm of intemperate zeal, put some of the Gibeonites to death; but God, in whose name the original parties swore, resented the deed; and was not appeased till seven sons of the murderer

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* Gen. xxi. xxii. xxiii. and xvi. xxviii.

were delivered up to capital punishment. In this affair, there is nothing extraordinary or peculiar to the Jewish system. One people enters into a treaty offensive and defensive with another, and confirms it in the most solemn manner. This treaty, which the contracting parties intended should bind the latest posterity, is violated after many generations; and the treachery is signally punished. There is surely nothing extraordinary or peculiar in all this. The history of other nations records many instances of the same kind. The only peculiarity is the answer of the Oracle to David's enquiry, which does not affect the obligation. The immediate revelation, on the contrary, seems to strengthen the argument; for it directly recognizes the obligation, which was assumed without even asking counsel at the mouth of the Lord; a circumstance which precludes all idea of peculiarity. Now, the Gibeonites were not of the children of Israel, but of the remnant of the Amorites, *and the children of Israel had sworn unto them* *. All the other circumstances of this transaction are in the ordinary course of human affairs. Besides, That could not be peculiar to Israel, in which another entire people were concerned who were not of the lineage of Abraham, and whose latest generations were represented in that covenant, and bound to observe it: for no man will pretend that Israel was the only party that was bound to fulfil their engagements. That could not be an extraordinary and inimitable agreement which contradicted the divine commandment. The history of nations does not contain a more common occurrence than this league with the Gibeonites. In this covenant we trace, with absolute certainty, the doctrine for which we contend; and ascertain its lawfulness from the approbation of God. It also furnishes a proof that a society is not terminated, and its obligations annulled, with the constituent generation, but continues the same in their descendents, and remains accountable for their obligations. The congregation of Israel was the same, and not another, though many generations separated the persons who entered into this treaty with the Gibeonites, from the sanguinary tyrant by whom it was broken; or else, how could David and his people be punished for breaking the original contract? "*The soul that sinneth it shall die.*"

In modern times this principle is completely established. It were endless to mention all the cases in which posterity are bound by the civil contracts of their fathers, in which they neither had nor could have any share. Any man may grant an annuity out of his own property to the person he wishes to favour, and to his descendents to the latest generation; which is certainly a partial devotement of himself and his

offspring,

* 1 Sam. xxi. 1, 2.

offspring, to the interest and service of the annuitant. It is true, that his successor may refuse to serve himself heir, and so avoid the payment, but he must abandon the inheritance at the same time. This, however, is no valid objection to the application of this instance to religious vows; for have not Seceders succeeded to the principles and profession of their ancestors, serving themselves heirs to that noble inheritance, as far as the nature of things will permit? But many cases occur which are not liable to the same objection. A Nation grants a pension to some meritorious servant, and to his heirs and successors. In process of time the original parties die, and an entire new set of men occupy the political stage; yet the Nation is confessedly bound to fulfil their engagements in which they had no voice, and which, perhaps, commenced before any one of the individuals which now compose it was born. The same observation may be made upon the treaties of Nations, in which it is quite common for the parties to conclude a lasting—a perpetual peace*; and not for themselves only, but in express words “*for their heirs and successors*” also†. These examples show, in the clearest manner, that the right of ancestors to represent and bind their posterity is an established principle in the jurisprudence of modern nations.

This natural right is admitted into revealed religion, by a special command from heaven; because that which is proper and necessary in civil affairs is not, for that reason, lawful and proper in the service of God. Covenanting is a duty which is taught by the light of nature: yet Abraham was called by God to enter into covenant with him. By this call, the Patriarch was reminded of his duty, and the whole church instructed in the propriety of introducing engagements of this kind into religion. The power of representing posterity was granted by a positive constitution, probably for the same reason. The law of Nature does not require men to enter into covenants with one another, but leaves it to their own discretion. But the profession which we make, and the duties to which we engage in covenanting with God, are all required by the Moral Law, which religious persons are very apt to consider as abundantly sufficient. On this account the Almighty required his people, by a voice from heaven, to enter into covenant, and submit to a superadded obligation to do his will.

This command was first directed to Abraham, the illustrious Father of all genuine Believers, when he was called out of Ur of the Chaldees; “Now the Lord had said unto Abraham, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, unto a land

* See public Papers in the New Ann. Reg. for 1783.

† New Ann. Reg. 1795, Russian Treaty.

land that I will shew thee—and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed*.” After many years the Lord appeared again to Abraham and renewed his covenant, favouring him with a more clear and extensive revelation of his gracious designs. “And I will establish my covenant between me and thee, and thy seed after thee, in their generations, for an everlasting covenant; to be a God unto thee and to thy seed after thee.”—“And God said unto Abraham, thou shalt keep my covenant, therefore, thou, and thy seed after thee, in their generations †.” This was the deed of settlement by which the Jewish church was formed into one worshipping society, and her privileges secured till the coming of Christ. Abraham had a personal interest in this covenant, which is expressed in these words; “I will bless thee, and thou shalt be a blessing ‡.” “After these things, the word of the Lord came unto Abram in a vision, saying, “Fear not Abram: I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward §.” By these revelations his present and eternal salvation was fully secured. To his natural offspring the Testimony and the Law of God were, by this covenant, almost exclusively committed till the fulness of time. They had the promise of Canaan, where the true religion was to be long maintained, and where, separated from the rest of the nations, they were to dwell alone. “And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God ||.”

But, it comprehended also, the privileges of his moral posterity. Abraham was honoured to be the father both of the Old and New Testament church. What other meaning do these words convey? “And in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed:” words which undoubtedly refer to the last dispensation of mercy, and which comprehend all his spiritual seed. That the covenant was established with Abraham, as the Father of the New Testament church, is indisputable. In the New Testament scriptures the Gentile believers are called the children of Abraham, while the unbelieving Jews, his natural posterity, are declared to have forfeited that honour; “Jesus said unto them, if ye were Abraham’s children, ye would do the works of Abraham ¶.” Our relation to that Patriarch, as professing Christians, and our interest in his covenant, is clearly asserted by the Apostle; “And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith, which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might

* Gen. xii. 1, 3.

† Ch. xvii. 7, 9.

‡ Ch. xii. 2.

§ Ch. xv. 1.

|| Ch. xvii. 8.

¶ John viii. 39.

might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised, that righteousness might be imputed to them also: and the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but also walk in the steps of our father Abraham—who is the father of us all, (as it is written, “I have made thee a father of many nations*.”) The Apostle writes in the same manner to the Galatians; “Know ye therefore, that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham†.” Nothing can be more evident than that, according to these words, all believers of every age and nation are the spiritual children of Abraham, whom God owns and accepts as such, that they may be blessed with him. This was intimated to himself, before the institution of circumcision and the giving of the law, by the glad tidings of salvation contained in the promise; “In thee shall all nations be blessed.” But, if believers are the children of Abraham, merely because they have the same principle of faith in their hearts, and the same profession in their mouths, it will not be easy to assign a reason why they are called his children, rather than the children of such eminent saints as these; Noah, Daniel, and Job, of whom God himself speaks in terms of singular approbation. But it plainly appears, that he was a Representative of the whole church, an honour to which no other Christian was ever exalted. For when God took him into covenant with himself, he ordained him the father of all the faithful. Thus, the covenant made with him is the grand charter of New Testament privileges, as well as of those enjoyed under the former dispensation,—the foundation upon which the New as well as the Old Testament church is built. To this, not only the Revelations of the Covenant of Grace, which were afterwards made to the holy Prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord, but those also which were imparted to the inspired writers of the New Testament, constantly referred. The great Apostle of the Gentiles calls the Revelation of the Covenant of Grace, the “Blessing of Abraham;” and insists that Christ redeemed us from wrath and punishment by his own precious blood, that this blessing might be freely vouchsafed to believing Gentiles, and particularly, that they who live under the Gospel Dispensation, whether Jews or Gentiles, might receive a plentiful communication of the gifts, graces, and comforts of the promised spirit, as the pledge and token of their title to the eternal inheritance: “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree; that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.”

* Rom. iv. 11, 12, 16, 17.

† Gal. iii. 7.

faith *.” Nor was there a promise ever given to sinful men which was not included in the covenant made with him and his spiritual seed; “Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He faith not, and to seeds, as of many; but as of one, and to thy seed which is Christ †.” And these promises which were made to Abraham and his seed, or the covenant made with them, is declared to be the Covenant of Grace, which was finally ratified by the blood of Christ: the very covenant, well ordered in all things and sure, which God makes with believers of every dispensation, and which is all their salvation, and all their desire. This is emphatically the Promise, which principally referred to Christ, in whom believing Jews and Gentiles should be united as the true children of Abraham,—the free promise of pardon, life, and salvation, through faith in Christ. And those who are really united to the Saviour, though descended from the Gentile nations, are the federal and genuine children of Abraham, and so are heirs according to the promise made with him and his spiritual seed, of which Christ is the head: “And if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise ‡.” The equal interest of the Gentile and Jewish churches, in the Abrahamic covenant, is farther confirmed by another passage in the same epistle: “Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise §.” Isaac was born by virtue of the covenant made with his father; and so also are all who believe in Christ for salvation: and the interest of both in that promise is perfectly equal. The words of Peter, addressed to his nation, are no less decisive; “For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even, as many as the Lord our God shall call ¶.” By the promise the Apostle means the Covenant of Abraham, which was no more to be confined to the Jews, but extended to all the families of Adam, however far from God and from his covenant they might be, even to as many of them as the Lord our God should call to the faith and fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ. The same promise is to the Gentile nations and to their children, to be fulfilled in its proper season, by which they were to become interested in the promise even as Isaac was. The incorporation of the Gentiles into a church state under the covenant of Abraham, as his spiritual children through faith in Christ, together with those of his natural offspring that believe, and their admission to an equal share in all the blessings and privileges of that covenant, and of the church state into which the divine favour had brought them, are beautifully described in the metaphor of the olive tree: “For if the first fruits be holy, the lump is also holy: and if the root be holy, so are the

* Gal. iii. 13, 14 † Ch. iii. 16. ‡ Ver. 29. § Ch. iv. 28. ¶ Acts ii. 39.

the branches. And if some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive tree, wert grafted in among them, and with them partake of the root and fatness of the olive tree *."

From these observations it appears, that the Abrahamic covenant, so far from being repealed, is established by the New Testament dispensation, and takes effect among believing Gentiles as well as the Jewish people. That ancient promise is the fountain from whence have issued the two streams of the Old and New Testament dispensations. That venerable Patriarch is the root which furnishes life and nourishment to the goodly branches of Jewish and Gentile churches, which have thrown a grateful and refreshing shade over the face of the whole earth. In fine, this covenant is the ground upon which the New Testament church stands, and the tenure by which she holds all her privileges. It was a transaction which comprehended both Jews and Gentiles; and the solemn and singular circumstances attending it respected both. The charge which Jehovah gave concerning the seed of Abraham, contains nothing inapplicable to the Gentile churches; and even the grant of Canaan to the Patriarch's natural seed is a type of the gift of heaven to all his spiritual seed, and therefore has an indirect respect to the Gentiles also.

Though the covenant made with Abraham equally respected his natural and moral descendants, the tribes of Israel, and the nations of the Gentile world, it pleased God to renew his covenant with the former, according to that which he made with their renowned ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, while he abandoned the latter, for many ages, to heathen darkness. The foundations of the Jewish church were laid at Sinai, when God promised to be their God, and they vowed to be his peculiar people †. But this solemn event was not a distinct, independent proceeding, unconnected with the covenant of Abraham, but one of the blessings which it contained. It was the application of that general promise to one branch of his posterity, or a renovation of it adapted to their peculiar circumstances, according to the original design of the divine Lawgiver. All the wonders which the arm of Jehovah wrought in favour of Israel, and all the blessings he bestowed upon them, were an accomplishment of the "truth to Jacob, and the mercy to Abraham, which he had sworn to their fathers from the days of old." On the same ground he required Israel to engage in his service. To shew them the folly of seeking salvation by the works of the Law, to which they discovered the usual propensities of human nature, and to

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reconcile

* Rom. xi. 16, 17.

† Exod. xix. 3, &c.

reconcile them to the free covenant of their fathers, he revealed himself in flaming fire. The thunders, the lightnings, the blackness, and darkness, and tempest, at which Sinai shook, and Israel trembled in their tents, the emblems of the glorious holiness and terrible majesty of Jehovah, were intended to show that people, that though they were now to receive a more complete system of laws than their fathers possessed, yet, they were, like them, to be favoured with access to God, and enjoy the blessings of his favour, only upon the footing of his gracious promise. The laws which they received, and the allegiance which they vowed to God, far from disannulling the promise which had been made to Abraham at his departure from Chaldea, powerfully incited them to believe in that everlasting covenant. For the law delivered at Horeb was a rule of life, corresponding to the promise by which the people of Israel were to walk: "A promise which every believing Israelite regarded as a sufficient security, not only for his pardon and acceptance with God, but likewise for whatever was necessary for the acceptable performance of duty."

In this renovation of the Abrahamic covenant at Horeb, the congregation of Israel represented their posterity. The words of Moses are express; "And he declared unto you his covenant which he commanded you to perform—Take heed unto yourselves, lest you forget the covenant of the Lord your God, which he made with you *. The Lord our God made a covenant with us in Horeb. The Lord made not this covenant with our fathers, but with us, even us, who are all of us here alive this day †." These words Moses addressed to Israel immediately before the renovation of the covenant at Horeb, when he used the following memorable terms: "Neither with you only do I make this covenant and this oath; but with him that standeth here with us this day before the Lord our God, and also with him that is not here with us this day ‡." When that people in after times apostatized from God, they are always charged with breaking the covenant made at Horeb. But this charge must have been unjust, if they were not parties; for no man can break a covenant which he never made either in his own person, or by his representative. Here the Ancestors of Israel, with the Divine approbation, exercised the right of devoting their posterity to God in a religious covenant. The solemn deed was renewed when the ministry of Moses was finished, when the Law was completed, and when they were now within sight of Canaan, ready to enter into their promised rest. "These are the words of the covenant which the Lord commanded Moses to make with the children of Israel, in the land of Moab,

* Deut. iv. 13, 23.

† Ch. v. 2, 3.

‡ Deut. xxix. 14, 15.

Moab, beside the covenant which he made with them in Horeb*." This covenant in the land of Moab, had a particular respect to that at Sinai, and was properly a renovation of it; for, said Moses to the congregation, "Ye stand this day all of you before the Lord your God, that thou shouldest enter into covenant with the Lord thy God, and into his oath which the Lord thy God maketh with thee this day: that he may establish thee this day for a people unto himself, and that he may be unto thee a God, as he hath said unto thee, and as he hath sworn unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob †." From this passage also, it appears, that the power of Israel to represent their succeeding race arose from the covenant made with Abraham;—and from that part of it which did not refer to the Jewish people in particular, but which belonged equally to Jews and Gentiles: "Thou shalt keep my covenant, therefore, thou, and thy seed after thee in their generations ‡." For, neither the duty of covenanting itself, nor the power of representing posterity, has any respect to the sacrifice and oblation, nor to the gift of Canaan. There is nothing typical in their nature; nothing local. There is nothing in this power of representing posterity which restricts it to the peculiar circumstances of Israel. It may, with equal facility, be extended to any church in any country; and applies as well to the New Testament dispensation as to the Old. It was fully as competent for our fathers to represent us in their radical covenant, as for Israel at Sinai to represent their succeeding generations, provided they had the same warrant. The purposes of this representation are of a spiritual and eternal nature. These are described in very striking language by God himself; "Thou hast avouched the Lord this day to be thy God, and to walk in his ways, and to keep his statutes, and his commandments, and his judgments, and to hearken unto his voice §." Here is nothing ceremonial, typical, or local, but duties and privileges which will apply to the church under any dispensation, and in every part of the globe.

S E C T VI.

THE PERSONS REPRESENTED IN A RELIGIOUS COVENANT.

THE congregation of Israel at Sinai and Jordan represented both their natural and moral descendants. The stranger entered into cove-
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* Deut. xxix. 1.

† Ver. 10, 12, 13.

‡ Gen. xvii. 9.

§ Deut. xxvi. 17.

nant along with the native Israelite ; and himself and children were bound to observe its conditions, as well as the lineal and natural seed of Abraham. "Ye stand this day all of you before the Lord your God ; your captains of your tribes—and thy stranger that is in thy camp, from the hewer of thy wood unto the drawer of thy water : that thou shouldest enter into covenant with the Lord thy God, and into his oath*." These Gentile strangers were then made to represent their posterity in a religious covenant ; and it is just as easy to understand how they can do so still. The Gentiles were never altogether cast off and excluded from all share in the blessings of salvation, for there were many of them in Israel all the time the Old Testament church existed ; and they suffered for their breach of covenant as well as the native Israelites. To be admitted into the Israelitish church, the Gentile convert renounced his kindred and nation, and fixed his permanent abode within the limits of the promised land, that he might be able to observe the Ceremonial Law. He became an Israelite—a federal son of Abraham. But these circumstances have passed away with the other peculiar and exclusive observances of the Jewish people. Under the present dispensation, the covenant made with Abraham embraces the Gentile nations as his spiritual seed, without requiring those conditions which the Ceremonial Law imposed. The promise runs no more in blood but in faith. And when the Jews are recovered from their infidelity and restored to the church, it will not be as the lineal descendants of the Patriarch, but as the professed disciples of Jesus. It is conceived that they will come into the church, in the same manner as others, not as a nation, but as individual believers.

The persons whom our fathers represented by the gracious constitution of God, are, in like manner, their natural and spiritual seed, their own children, and all others who accede to their principles and profession. These two classes still constitute the descendants of the church. The children of professing parents are affected by the federal obligations of their fathers as soon as they are born. From the moment of their birth, they are members of the church by the same gracious constitution of God which comprehends them in the religious covenants of their ancestors. They belong to the household of faith, and have a federal right to all the privileges of the family suited to their years†.

Therefore,

* Deut. xxix. 11, 12.

† The Israelitish infants had a Right to Circumcision, for God *commanded* them to be circumcised ; and what can give a more perfect right than the command of God ? To the Hebrew infants circumcision was a real and great advantage ; it was the to-

Therefore, from that moment the obligation of the covenant reaches them, and they are bound as strongly as their progenitors to fulfil their engagements as divine Providence puts it in their power. When these children arrive at maturity, it is their duty to confess the name of Christ as their fathers had done before them, by renewing their covenant with God ; but they do not now come under this obligation for the first time. As members of the church they were covenanters from the beginning.

When adults declare their adherence to a covenanted church, and ask admission to her solemn ordinances, they put themselves under the obligation of that religious covenant which the society has sworn. Those foreigners who are naturalized and become subjects and citizens in this country, are from that moment bound by all our national compacts, as much as any other class of men. Under the Law, those Gentiles who acceded to the Jewish church became an integral part of that covenanting people. Thus, there is no difference between the children of the original members of the church, and those strangers who embrace her profession at a mature age.

Of these two classes the spiritual progeny of the church consists : and the church, as such, can have none but spiritual or moral descendants. Adult converts are obviously of this character ; and the children of church-members must be considered in the same light, from the moment

when God's covenant which exhibited them as the rising hopes of the church, in and by whom the true religion was to be preserved and transmitted to the generations following ; and also, as the objects of that special Providence that watches over the members and interests of the church. This token, also, pointed them out as the approved and primary objects of the church's concern, prayers, and nurture, Gen. xvii. 9, 10, 11, 12. Their right to this ordinance may be justly inferred from the sentence of excommunication to which the want of it exposed them. The unconscious infants were punished for want of circumcision in their own persons, their negligent parents only in a remote and indirect manner, in the persons of their excommunicated children, verse 14. But to punish them for wanting that to which they had no right, and in which they had no interest, seems to be absurd. Therefore, the infants of New Testament parents have a right to Baptism ; otherwise, infants under the Old Testament dispensation were in a far better condition than those under the New, and the privileges of the Old Testament church more numerous and extensive, contrary to the express declarations of scripture, 2 Cor. iii. 9, 10, 11. The mode of administering the covenant may be altered ; but, if the scripture be true, the number of the church's privileges will remain undiminished, and their value unimpaired. Nay, the words of the Apostle teach us to expect, under the present dispensation, advantages, if not more numerous, at least more precious, than the Jewish church enjoyed ; for the ministration of righteousness—the New Testament dispensation **EXCEEDS** in glory, yea, is much more glorious.

ment of their birth. Children of Christian parents are the natural offspring of individuals, but the spiritual seed of the church as much as the full grown convert. By the appointment of God, indeed, their moral descent is inseparably connected with their natural; but they are perfectly distinct. It is the duty of a parent to dedicate his progeny to God, from whom he received them. But when he enters into covenant along with the church to which he belongs, it is not as a father, but as a church member. His children are comprehended among those of the church; for Jerusalem which is above, is the mother of us all. And they are, together with the present rising generation, and every succeeding race, set apart by their general parent, at the same time, to the service of God. In the covenanting period, our fathers seem to have viewed this matter in the same light, for they have contented themselves with general expressions, which are in no respect inconsistent with the sentiments maintained here. Accordingly, the National Covenant contains these words; "And finally, being convinced in our minds, and confessing with our mouths, that the present and succeeding generation in this land, are bound to keep the foresaid national oath and subscription inviolable." The same indefinite language is used in the Solemn League and Covenant: "That we and our posterity after us, may, as brethren, live in faith and love, and the Lord may delight to dwell in the midst of us." Many among our ancestors, when they entered into their covenants, had no children of their own bodies, and not a few, in all probability, had ceased to hope for this enjoyment; for this is ever the case among all large bodies of men. Therefore it would have been absurd for them to have devoted their posterity to the Lord, but as members of the society. Those who were blessed with children might have their eye particularly upon their own offspring, as in duty bound; but, if they acted properly, their proceeding could not be confined to them. Our fathers endeavoured to confine their obligations to the "succeeding generations in this land;" but, perhaps, this is an improper limitation. It was certainly proper to have a particular respect to those generations which were to succeed them in this country, whether their own lineal descendents or others: but they ought to have inserted a general clause, embracing all those individuals, or bodies of men, who might put their trust under the wings of their God, by adopting the same principles, and making the same profession in connection with them.

The church's descendents are all those who accede to her Testimony, and live under her laws. It is of no consequence where they dwell, or to what nation they belong, or what civil institutions they live under.

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In Christ Jesus, there is neither Barbarian, Scythian, Bond nor Free. Those who embrace the Testimony and Profession of the covenanted church of Scotland, are the lawful progeny of our fathers in their religious capacity, though their lot were cast in the remotest parts of the earth. It is the folly, the presumption, and the carnal policy of worldly men, which have set up their particular regulations as walls of separation among Christians. Far from countenancing such partialities, the scripture endeavours to combine all the families of Adam, into one delightful fraternity. Covenanting, or avouching the Lord to be our God, is a religious duty, and competent only to the church of Christ, or to the individuals who compose it. The design is not carnal and worldly, but spiritual—"That we may walk in the ways of the Lord, that we may keep his statutes, and his commandments, and his judgments, and hearken to his voice." We know not what a Nation or Kingdom, as such, has to do with this duty more than with the Lord's Supper, or any other ordinance. What has this spiritual duty, which is the business of the church alone, to do with the limits of an earthly kingdom, or with the particular forms of civil government? Did the Apostolic churches mould themselves upon these civil, political, or local institutions or circumstances? Or, in what part of the New Testament is it required, or any encouragement given to attempt it? All the people of a nation may, and ought to be church members, and in this capacity enter into covenant to discharge their respective duties to God, to themselves, and to their neighbour, with integrity: and this may, with sufficient propriety, be called National Covenanting. But, in any other sense, the term is inconsistent with the spiritual nature of the Messiah's kingdom. The Law of God prescribes the duty of Magistrate and People, and the church insists upon all her members to fulfil their respective duties; but has no knowledge of such distinctions. High and Low, Rich and Poor, Magistrates and People, are all melted down into church members, forming one society with the same laws and privileges. With the church, constituted according to scripture, there is no respect of persons. All her members, by whatever names or stations they are known in the world, are equally members of Christ's mystical body. "For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread *."

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* 1 Cor. x. 17.

S E C T. VII.

THE POWER OF REPRESENTING POSTERITY IN A RELIGIOUS COVENANT, NOT
A JEWISH PECULIARITY.

THE Moral Law, which was given to Israel, certainly contains no peculiarity ; but is the same in every age, and to every people. We must seek for the peculiarities of the Old Testament dispensation in the Ceremonial and Judicial Law.

The ceremonial institutions were all shadows of good things to come. They only signified that Christ had not yet put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. When Christ came, they became old and unprofitable. They had no more to do after the arrival of the Saviour, whose approach they proclaimed.

In the state of civil affairs, the New Testament required no alterations, excepting in a few instances ; such as the distinctions among the tribes, the law with regard to the cities of refuge, the prohibition of intercourse with lepers, or others, that were ceremonially unclean : regulations which, under the Old Testament, served as a fence to the Ceremonial Law as distinguished from the Moral, and prevented the interference of the church with the state. But, the ceremonial institutions having obtained their end in the death of Christ, there is no more occasion for this judicial fence. As to the intrinsic nature of civil government, and the immediate end of it, the good of civil society, the New Testament made no alterations. It is evident, then, that neither the duty of covenanting in general, nor the right of religious ancestors to represent their posterity in particular, comes under the description either of the Ceremonial or Judicial Law. This right is not a ceremonial institution, because it has nothing in its nature that necessarily refers to the coming of Christ as a future event : representing posterity in a religious covenant, in which we avouch the Lord to be our God by solemn oath, says not whether the Saviour is, or is not come. Nor does it belong to the Judicial Law. No person will maintain that it is now unlawful for the members of a political body to enter into conventions, and bind their posterity, as well as themselves, by solemn oaths and subscriptions to make good their promises. If we could consider the representation of Israel at Sinai, merely in a civil or political view, it would have been the same with such a transaction. On this supposition it must have belonged, not to that part of the Judicial Law which respected the peculiar circumstances of the Jews, but to that part of it which is remaining

maining in force. But it could not belong to the Judicial Law, because the covenanting at Sinai and Jordan was altogether a religious solemnity.

There is nothing in this representation which refers to the local situation of Israel, like the Temple or the Altar; for what may prevent any nation from doing as Israel did at the command of God? It is physically impossible for all the males of every nation to go thrice a-year to their capital city to worship there; but there is not a people under heaven, who cannot devote themselves and their children to God. This duty will apply to the church in any situation, and under any dispensation of grace. The peculiar privileges of Israel, however, were attached to the land of Canaan, and to the city and temple of Jerusalem, and could not be transported beyond the limits of that country. Of this assertion, the present condition of the Jews is a proof; for since their dispersion, they offer no sacrifice nor oblation to God. Their ceremonial observances are either become impracticable or palpably absurd. The ordinance of circumcision is indeed a portable institution; but to prevent the observation of it, it is not only expressly forbidden in the New Testament, but treated with contempt. "Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision *."

A peculiar privilege must be abolished by the same authority which gave it existence, when it is no more to be enjoyed. But where is the abolition of this right to be found? According to Daniel, the design of our Lord's coming was to cause the sacrifice and the oblation cease—to abolish the Ceremonial Law, the middle wall of partition, that every peculiarity might be removed, and Jew and Gentile be blended into one people. To prevent mistakes, those peculiar circumstances in the Jewish worship, which the New Testament church might be in danger of retaining, are particularly pointed out. But, though mankind are much inclined to retain and exercise this right, and though our Lord, who knows all things, knew that it would be received in the church, and powerfully influence the sentiments and conduct of his people, the scripture makes no mention of its abolition, as one of the peculiarities which distinguished the Jewish people from every other. The Passover was abolished when Jesus instituted the Supper. Circumcision passed finally away, when he charged the disciples, "saying, Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost †." The Sabbath was changed from the seventh to the first day of the week, by the frequent appearances of the Saviour to his disciples on that day,

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* Phil. iii. 2.

† Mat. xxviii. 19.

the illapses of the Spirit, and the approved observation of inspired men. The right of which we are speaking, was not an ordinance indeed, but a member of one. But, even in those cases where the substance of the ordinance remained, the abolished circumstances are either stated in express terms, or by necessary implication. One day in seven was devoted to God under the New Testament as well as under the Old, but it was changed from the seventh to the first day of the week, which is necessarily inferred from the practice of Christ and his Apostles. Instrumental music was used under the Old Testament in religious worship. God is still to be praised, but in a more spiritual manner, not with instruments of music, but with the heart and lips only. This is an unavoidable consequence from the words of the Apostle, where, describing the manner in which New Testament believers are to conduct the praises of God, he passes over in silence the use of musical instruments*. But the New Testament scriptures give us no direction about the manner of conducting religious vows, though they undoubtedly speak of the duty as still in force, and observed by the churches.

Nor can it be fairly argued that this right is of so trivial a nature that it deserves no particular notice. No approved circumstance in the worship of God can be of trifling moment. But this, God himself has honoured with his special notice, both in his covenant with Abraham, and in his first particular application of it to the natural posterity of the Patriarch at Sinai and Jordan. It is also represented by the prophets, in their reproofs to that rebellious people, as a heinous aggravation of their guilt, that they had broken the covenant which the Lord had made with their fathers. These things duly considered, it seems indispensibly necessary that in a perfect rule of faith and manners, the abolition of a circumstance of such magnitude to the Old Testament church, which so greatly increased the guilt of her apostacy, which run through all her privileges, and characterized all her worship, should be clearly marked.

If this right was peculiar to the Jews, the exercise of it must now be displeasing to God. Why then is it not forbidden? If it be still the privilege of the church, it cannot be a peculiarity. Besides, as this right belongs neither to the Ceremonial nor Judicial Law, if it be an exclusive appointment of the former dispensation, it is a detached and singular privilege, among the extraordinary institutions with which the Jewish people were favoured. For this reason it was the more necessary to point it out, and set it aside by a clear and positive prohibition, because it was more ready to slip into the faith and practice of the New

Testament

* Eph. v. 19. Col. iii. 16. Jam. v. 13.

Testament church. It is granted by many, on evidence which has never yet been overthrown, that Covenanting is a moral duty which shall continue in the church till the end of time. In the case of Israel, we find that duty coupled with a right of representing their posterity, which is supposed to be peculiar to them, without any intimation that it is so. Surely, then, it was necessary to disjoin them by express revelation, to prevent an unhallowed imitation. For, the Law of God is not designedly left imperfect; it is not expressed in studied obscurity, nor jumbled into inextricable confusion, to ensnare the unwary subject, and gratify the malignity of a cruel lord.

The adoption and practice of this peculiarity cannot be innocent in the present dispensation; for it must be an act of will-worship—what God does not now require, but wills to cease. Yet the scripture, which is intended to lead us unto all truth, leaves us, in this instance of sin and duty, without a rule of conduct. And if man may be guilty when he introduces into religious worship what God has not required, or wills to cease with another dispensation, without giving us any intimation of his will, how are we to vindicate Him from being the author of sin? It is an acknowledged principle of justice and equity among reasonable men, that laws should be made known to all the subjects, that the crimes which they forbid may be avoided, or the transgressors left without excuse. But, though the Father of mercies is our Lawgiver, we are not, in this case, it seems, to expect that reasonable and necessary indulgence, which is the more singular, as he has granted it in every other. The right of offering sacrifices to God, was not a peculiar privilege of the Jews, but belonged to every family, age, and country; but the Passover was a peculiar ordinance, instituted in Egypt, and enjoined anew at the giving of the Law. Of this rite, the scriptures record the institution, and delineate all the circumstances, with scrupulous accuracy. The first institution contains several temporary or peculiar circumstances; but the final directions of Moses in the 16th Chapter of Deuteronomy, by leaving them out, shewed that people, with sufficient clearness, that they were no longer to be observed. The sacrament of the Lord's Supper, which superseded the Passover, was, in the beginning, attended with many circumstances of the same kind; but the Apostle Paul, in his first Epistle to the Corinthians, states, in precise and unequivocal terms, the Institution and the Manner in which it is to be dispensed to the end of time. But upon this Right, once connected with the duty of public vows, the scriptures observe a profound silence. Why is this duty, the crowning point of the Christian's profession, left encumbered with extraneous matter? Why are

the people of God, if this be a peculiar Jewish privilege, left, in this instance, to grope in the dark? God acts a sovereign, but never a capricious nor unwise part. If the wisdom of Christians be insufficient to guide them in other duties, it is no less so in this.

If this right be a Jewish peculiarity, the adoption of it, and every attempt to reduce it to practice, must be hurtful to the New Testament church. Will-worship can produce nothing but evil. To observe it now must be to go back to the beggarly elements, to the rudiments of the world. This truth the Galatians exemplified; "When we were children, we were in bondage under the elements of the world. But now after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage *?" These Gentiles, but just delivered from the darkness of heathen delusions, by a strange infatuation, turned aside, and submitted to the dark hints and severe injunctions of the Mosaic Law: they were zealous for observing the peculiar institutions of the Jews, and thereby endangered their eternal welfare. The same Apostle earnestly dissuades the Colossians from observing the ceremonial rites of the Law, which he calls the first principles or elements of the Church in her infant state, and which were in themselves of a carnal nature: "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, AFTER THE RUDIMENTS OF THE WORLD, and not after Christ †." Such observance he declares to be now contrary to the mind and will of Christ revealed in the gospel, and that none of these peculiar and ceremonial rites now lead the soul to him alone for salvation. † An instance might be given of a Jewish peculiarity, which the folly and presumption of man have admitted into the New Testament churches, and which, as might be expected, has every where been productive of the very worst consequences. But what evil has the exercise of this right done? What danger brings it to the souls of men; what ordinance has it injured; what doctrine has it vitiated? What religious exercise has it misled, impeded, or weakened? Has it not bound men to God and to one another with the strongest ties? Is it not calculated to create the strongest confidence among church members of which the present imperfect state will admit? Does it not unite the succeeding generations of the righteous together, combine them into one compact body, obliging them to walk in the same way, and to mind the same thing; and thus secures them more effectually from the attacks of earth and hell? These are important benefits which no example (for we have shewn that obligation it has none) can effectuate

* Gal. iv. 3, 9.

† Col. ii. 8.

in any comparable degree. A Jewish right transplanted by the error of men into the present dispensation, contrary to the will of God, producing only good—good substantial and permanent is a singularity indeed.

But, though it belonged to no class of singular privileges bestowed upon Israel, it may be pleaded, that it was a solitary but special prerogative of the Old Testament. This plea would ill accord with the confessed superiority of the present dispensation. Many special favours Jehovah bestowed upon the Jewish nation which no other people had reason to expect; but he conferred no benefit upon the Jewish church, of which we are deprived, or for which we have not received a valuable equivalent; for the present dispensation, the Apostle declares "*excelleth in glory.*" The Jewish church had the seal of Circumcision; we have received Baptism in its room. They had the Passover; we are now blessed with the ordinance of the Lord's Supper. They had their bloody sacrifices; our faith is now immediately directed to Him who appeared once in the end of the world to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.

They had their ordinances of purification; we have the washing of water by the word. Religious Vows is the privilege of both dispensations, and was enjoyed by Israel as a Church, not as a Nation. Their fathers represented them in the radical covenant of their church, which was, unquestionably, a real and important benefit to that and all succeeding generations. What have we received for this, if it be not now competent to church members? There is not an ordinance of the New Testament which in the least resembles it, or which, in any respect, answers the same purpose. Have we received nothing?—Let the Apostle no more assert that the glory of the present dispensation *excelleth*; that the privileges and benefits of the New Testament church are more valuable and extensive than those of the Old. If Ancestors cannot now represent their Posterity in Religious Covenants, the goodness of God is retrograde; and the infancy of the Church is more highly favoured than her maturity.

But farther, there is nothing in this right inconsistent with the characteristics of the New Testament dispensation. It is the distinguishing glory of this dispensation to reveal the Saviour as already come. It furnishes the church with a nearer and fuller view of the Covenant of Grace. Believers now see the condition of it fulfilled in his obedience and death; and all its promises, in him yea and amen. They behold him as their great Prophet removing the vail which concealed the sublime mysteries of salvation, and exhibiting them to public view.

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They see him as their King, meek and having salvation, and exalted to give repentance and remission of sins. The New Testament dispensation has extinguished all the observances of the Ceremonial Law. It has removed those civil institutions which were peculiar to the Jews, and served as a fence to their ritual, and has left the nations at liberty to devise and adopt any form of government they please, which offers no injury to the law of God. It has introduced the positive institutions of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, and has changed the Sabbath from the seventh to the first day of the week. It corrects the gross mistakes concerning moral duties, which, in our Saviour's time, prevailed among church members. It gives further instructions concerning the occasions and manner of performing many of them, and sets the motives and encouragements to the practice of them in the strongest light: and, in fine, it has extended the kingdom of Christ to all the nations of the earth, preferring neither nations nor individuals, but placing all upon the same level. To none of these things is the right for which we plead contradictory. The ceremonial rites and peculiar civil institutions of the former dispensation are either become altogether impracticable, or damnable to the presumptuous observer, and the sabbath of the seventh day improper. But this right is of so spiritual and general a nature, that it is as practicable now as before; it combines with the present state of things as easily as the duty of covenanting itself, and is, in every respect, as proper since the coming of Christ, as before his appearance in human nature.

Again, it is still incumbent upon Christians to regard not only the spirit, but likewise the letter and form, of many precepts and examples of the Old Testament. "It will hardly be disputed that whatever was the duty of ancient Israel, is so far still the duty of Christians, as it had no necessary relation to the peculiarities of their church, or of their state, or as it may be practised by any church or state without impropriety or inconsistency with the advantages of the New Testament dispensation. And then we are by no means to depart from the letter or form of any precept of God's law, if he has not himself given us any intimation that we may depart from it. Hence, if the form of a duty be the same in the New Testament as in the Old, we may conclude that the form as well as the spirit of it is obligatory upon us. And, if a duty, with respect to the spirit of it, is plainly enjoined in the New Testament without any change either expressed or implied, of the form or manner in which it was practised under the Old Testament, we may safely conclude, that with regard to such a duty, we are not allowed to deviate

deviate from the form prescribed by the divine authority of the Old Testament.

But some appear to be of opinion that the precepts and examples of the Old Testament, repeated or referred to in the New, derive their authority and obligation upon us from that repetition, or that reference.

So far is this opinion from being true, that, in some respects, the authority of the New Testament rests upon the authority of the Old, as its foundation: not that the New is less immediately from God than the Old; their origin and intrinsic excellence are equally divine: but, with regard to order and connection, the one is to the other as the higher parts of a building are to the lower. The New Testament continually establishes the authority of the Old, and builds upon it. The history of the New Testament answers to the prophecies of the Old. As to the doctrines of the New Testament, our Lord and his Apostles constantly referred their hearers to the Old, affirming that they said "no other things than what Moses and the Prophets had said before." Our Saviour and his Apostles proposed many examples to the imitation of their hearers, as obligatory upon them, by the authority alone of the Old Testament. So, our Lord defended the conduct of his disciples, in plucking and eating the ears of corn on the Sabbath, from the example of David, Matt. xii. 3, 4, 5. So the Apostles encourage us to faith, to patience, and prayer, from the examples of Abraham, of Job, and Elias, Rom. iv. James v. 11, 17, 18. The phrase, *It is written*, which commonly in the New Testament denotes divine authority, is applied to the history of the Old, Gal. iv. 22. Indeed, hardly any thing would appear more unreasonable to an impartial reader of the New Testament, than to suppose that, when the penmen of it repeated a precept, or referred to an example of the Old Testament, they meant to give something a divine authority and obligation which otherwise it would not have had.

For a great part of the first century, the Old Testament was all the written word that Christians were in possession of; and yet they were enjoined to take heed to that word, and commended for searching the scriptures daily. The Bereans were more noble than those of Thessalonica. But in what respect were they more noble? In setting aside the authority of the Old Testament? Quite the reverse: it consisted in manifesting so high a regard to the authority of the Old Testament, that they would not receive even the doctrine of the Apostles, without examining whether it was or was not, agreeable to that divine record. It is plain, therefore, that the first Christians subjected their hearts and consciences to the Old Testament as much as ever the Jews did.

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And why should not we do the same? Were church members loosed from their obligation to submit to the authority of the Old Testament as soon as all the books of the New Testament were published? By no means. The obligation was constituted by God himself, and none but he could loose them from it; and that he never did. Nay, they were more obliged than ever to read and study the Old Testament, when the Lord, in the New, had drawn aside the veil, and had placed the great things of his law in the most glorious point of view.

The authority, therefore, of the Old Testament, being in itself superior to objection, we are bound to obey the precepts, and to imitate the examples of it, even such of them as we cannot find expressly repeated in the New Testament. So, we are obliged by the authority of the Old Testament, to abstain from marrying within the prohibited degrees of consanguinity; to swear to the truth when called before a lawful magistrate; to spare the life of one chargeable with accidental manslaughter; to have the seal of the covenant administered to our children: and yet none of these precepts is to be found expressly repeated in the New Testament. In the same manner, the history of the Old Testament, comprehending a period of nearly four thousand years, contains a vast variety of characters and situations unnoticed in the New Testament, which are highly proper for our imitation. We are not more bound to imitate the patience of Job, which is mentioned, than the victorious chastity of Joseph, and the faithful friendship between David and Jonathan, which are not mentioned in the New Testament.

Besides, with respect to those situations which are common to both the Old and New Testaments, the duty of the church, in some of them, is much more fully exemplified in the Old. The New Testament, indeed, gives us some account of the public proceedings of the churches planted by the Apostles, of those in Jerusalem, in Antioch, in Ephesus: but these accounts are very short; it is plain, they were never intended to be the only standard of the duty of God's people in a visible church state, to the exclusion of the various useful examples of their duty in that capacity, which the more copious, particular, and long continued history of the Old Testament supplies. In the New Testament we have hardly any more than a view of a particular church during the stay of an Apostle in it, which was sometimes but one day, and seldom longer than a few weeks: but, in the Old, we see the church of Israel passing through a great variety of conditions, sometimes in prosperity, sometimes in adversity; sometimes excited to reformation, sometimes seduced to idolatry by the civil magistrate, or by her own office-bearers;

ers; sometimes lively and zealous in the observation of divine ordinances, and sometimes growing lukewarm, carnal, and secure. Hence, we need not be surprised to find some duties incumbent on church members, in their joint capacity, more clearly exemplified in the Old Testament than in the New; since, in that long succession of circumstances and situations which are recorded of the Jewish church, we cannot, in reason, suppose but that there must have been occasions for the regular performance of whatsoever the Lord requires of a people in their church capacity: but so extensive an exemplification of such duties is not to be expected in the period of about thirty years after our Saviour's ascension; the period to which the history of the New Testament is confined.

On the whole, nothing is more absurd than attempting to raise our esteem of one part of Revelation at the expence of another. A believing submission of heart is due to all that God says. It is undeniable that we have more of the great and precious promises of the everlasting covenant, and more precepts and examples, with respect to the duties of civil and of sacred society, in the Old than we have in the New Testament. The New Testament constantly, in all its histories, in its rules and exhortations, in its doctrines and reasonings, confirms the authority of the Old: so that, if a duty is plainly enjoined in the Old Testament, and is not altered, or annulled in the New, we need not scruple to go forward in the practice of such a duty upon the authority alone of the former *."

In fine, the depravity of the Gentile world requires this obligation to duty as well as that of Israel. The Jews were a stiff-necked and rebellious people, whom it was difficult to restrain by any obligation. God, in mercy to them, as well as for his own glory, not only promulgated from the top of Sinai the law of the ten commandments, but also laid them under the superadded obligation of a Solemn Covenant, in which he promised to be their God, and they vowed to be his people. Man is not now become more obedient to the revealed will of God. Restraints, numerous and powerful as ever, are required to check the career of human folly. Daily experience proves, that no obligations are sufficiently powerful to restrain the sinner. The thunders of the Law do not affright him; the allurements of the Gospel do not constrain him; and what, with many, is of greater moment than either, public opinion loses its controuling influence. He proclaims his sin as Sodom, and refuses to be ashamed. If all men do not run to

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the same excess of riot, it is not for want of inclination ; but of the divine permission, the opportunity, or the means of gratification. Even the genuine Christian feels a strong propensity to evil, which, without the immediate aid of Heaven, he is by no means able to correct. If then, this obligation was necessary under the Old Testament, it is no less so under the New. The voice of human necessity is as loud as ever ; the benevolence of God as perfect. His wisdom and love dictated that mode of covenanting to Israel. This was the only necessity which bound the Father of mercies, and the same necessity still remains.

S E C T. VIII.

SAME SUBJECT CONTINUED.

WHEN the church was erected on earth, the relation between God and his people was constituted by this declaration, " I will be their God, and they shall be my people." This declaration, God made to Abraham, and in him to his descendents ; " I will be a God to thee, and to thy seed after thee." The Patriarch solemnly signified his assent to this promise, both as it respected himself and his posterity : such was the Abrahamic covenant. It was directed to the Patriarch, who was present and giving his consent ; but it was also directed to his seed, both Jews and Gentiles, who were still in the womb of futurity ; and though Abraham neither did nor could believe in that promise for them, yet he assuredly assented with his whole heart, that God should deal with them as he had now declared, according to the tenor of that covenant. In this manner he was the Father of believers, the Heir of the world, the Representative of all his seed. Thus the representation in religious covenants is no part of the Mosaic œconomy, for it began in Abraham four hundred years before Moses was born ; and, accordingly, must be altogether disconnected from the peculiar circumstances of the chosen people. But when their church state was established, Jehovah renewed the promise which he had made to Abraham, to be their God, and the God of their seed : and Israel, as in duty bound, and as their illustrious ancestor had done before them, assented to the covenant, professing to take him for their own God ; and, at the same time, their willingness that it should be extended to their seed ; and that they and their children should be treated according to their fidelity. Thus were they constituted the representatives of their posterity ; and all the

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succeeding covenants which that people swore, till their final dispersion, were no more than an echo to the covenant made with their fathers at Horeb, the truth of which has already been shewn from the language of their prophets, and the dispensations of Divine Providence towards them.

This species of representation which God constituted when he entered into covenant with Abraham, and afterwards applied to the Old Testament church at Horeb, was never abolished, and therefore must still remain. When the Gentiles were admitted into the visible church, at the beginning of the present Dispensation, the ordinance of circumcision, which ratified the covenant made with Abraham and his seed, was abolished, and another was instituted in its place, but the covenant itself remained unaltered. Therefore, the Gentile church, who gradually succeeded to the Promise of Abraham, became heirs to a covenant which was addressed at once to the fathers and their succeeding race. This is clear from the words of our Lord; "Therefore say I unto you, the kingdom shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof*." These words certainly denote that the Gentiles and their children were now comprehended in that covenant, from which the Jews and their posterity had just fallen; and, that the church state is the same among the Gentiles that it was among the Jews. The church state is not changed; but only taken from one and given to another; therefore, the terms of the covenant, constituting the relation between God and his people, must continue to run in these terms: "I will be your God, and the God of your seed;" and be followed by their corresponding assent, Be it unto us, and unto our posterity, according to thy word, O Lord.

The Gentiles did not succeed to another covenant, constituting another church state, but to the same which the unbelieving Jews had enjoyed. This truth the Apostle illustrates by the beautiful figure of the olive tree: "And if some of the branches be broken off, and thou being a wild olive-tree, wert grafted in amongst them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive-tree†." It is perfectly obvious that the natural branches are the Jews, and the wild branches are the Gentile converts, who are brought into the same church state from which the unbelieving Jews, the natural branches, are broken off; and are united to the remnant of the Jewish church, and share in their religious state; for they are grafted in among them, and with them partake of the root and fatness of the olive tree. The Church's covenant,

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which

* Mat. xxi. 43.

† Rom. xi. 17.

which constituted her relation to God, still remained—the root and stem of the olive-tree which nourished all the branches. The believing Jews still constituted the church; and to them the Gentiles were joined, and formed one society, standing upon the old stock, and nourished from the same root.

In the same passage, the Apostle declares the time is coming when the Jews shall be restored to their ancient privileges, in connexion with the Gentile nations. “And they also, if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be grafted in: for God is able to graft them in again. For if thou wert cut out of the olive-tree, which is wild by nature, and were grafted, contrary to nature, into a good olive-tree; how much more shall these, which be the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive-tree *?” The Jewish people, the natural branches, are broken off, and cast aside for a while; but they shall be restored to their former religious state;—the very same state on which they originally stood, and on which they would have always continued, if they had not been broken off. But the covenant in which they were once interested, was addressed to them and to their seed, was made with them who were present, and them who were not, as Moses declares; and the metaphor authorizes us to conclude, that the covenant which God will make with them, at their restoration, will be precisely of the same tenor. Now, this privilege they are no longer to enjoy alone; for they are only restored to the stock on which the Gentiles shall continue to stand; and both shall flourish together till the close of time.

The unity of Jew and Gentile in the same church state, and by the same covenant which was given to Abraham, will farther appear from these words: “For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us †.” In this passage, the Apostle represents the Jewish people and the Gentile nations as two families separated by a partition wall. But this partition, he says, is now taken down, and the two societies are brought into one. Therefore, the Jewish church was not dissolved at the calling of the Gentiles; for the taking down of a partition cannot dissolve a society, nor can it alter the covenant by which the society exists. The Gentiles were not formed into a separate society, constituted by a separate covenant; but were added to the Jewish church, according to the promise of Abraham, their common father. From these things it follows, that Posterity, whether in being or not, hold the same place in the Gentile churches as they did among the Jews. But at Sinai, God declared, according to the promise made to Abraham, “I will be your God, and the

* Rom. xi. 23, 24.

† Eph. ii. 14.

the God of your seed ;” and to this declaration Israel gave their solemn assent. And, since the covenant is carried forward into the New Testament dispensation, and continues the very same as at the beginning, God reveals himself in the same manner to his people ; and in the same manner, they express their consent, to this day.

We shall only add, that the representation for which we plead, is recognized by the Apostle Peter, as belonging to the New Testament dispensation : “ For the promise, (or the covenant of Abraham) is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call *.” These words are a renewed display of the Abrahamic covenant, and almost in the very words which God used to the Patriarch ; “ I will be a God to thee, and to thy seed after thee.” But it is indisputable that the covenant with Abraham embraced himself and his posterity : and since the same terms must denote the same ideas, it must be equally certain, that a covenanting people, and their posterity, are intended by the Apostle in this address. The purpose of God, and the design of the Apostle, are not affected by the sense which the hearers of the gospel put upon the promise ; but it is natural to suppose that the Jewish converts, on this occasion, clearly apprehended the meaning of the Apostle’s words ; for, both the speaker and the hearers had been accustomed to consider themselves, not only as the children of Abraham, but the heirs of his covenant, and debtors to observe all its requirements.

In applying the covenant of Abraham, the Apostle distinguishes the persons to whom it is addressed into those who were present, and those who were absent. To those who were present, he says, “ the promise is to you, and to your children ;” to those who were absent, the promise is “ to all that are afar off,” and to their children, even to the Gentile nations ; who were hitherto strangers and foreigners, but who shall be called to the faith and fellowship of the gospel : the promise is to you ; and not to you only, but also to your children ; God reveals the covenant of Abraham to you ; and, as he did to the Old Testament church, he will transmit its privileges to your succeeding race, even to as many as the Lord our God shall call. It is as essential to this covenant to be addressed to the children as to the fathers ; it is as truly to the former as to the latter ; and such was the design of God, if the obvious meaning of language is to be regarded. Thus, the covenant which constitutes the relation between God and his people, is as comprehensive as in the days of Abraham, or the congregation of Israel at Horeb or Jordan. In those days it comprehend-

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* Acts ii. 39.

ed the immediate covenanter and his posterity, and reached down to all the individuals of that particular race, whom the Lord their God should call: in New Testament times, by a parity of reason, it still comprehends the covenanting society and their successors, and descends to all whom the Lord our God shall call to embrace the same testimony, and make the same profession.

S E C T. IX.

ADVANTAGES RESULTING FROM THE OBLIGATION OF THE RELIGIOUS COVENANTS OF ANCESTORS UPON THEIR POSTERITY.

1. THE obligation of the religious vows of ancestors impels to the performance of duty by very powerful motives. Every privilege bestowed by God, is an act of free and unconstrained beneficence. Every commandment enjoined by him, according to the Covenant of Grace, is also an instance of kindness, which none can force from him, and which none has a right to expect. Acts of undeserved goodness render God the natural and approved object of gratitude; and the debt of gratitude, it has been observed, approaches nearest to a full and complete obligation. These favours not only interest us in the glory of God; they also excite us to be the instruments of promoting his glory by our own personal endeavours. "The love and esteem," says Dr. Smith, "which grow upon acquaintance and habitual approbation, necessarily lead us to be pleased with the prosperity of the man, who is the object of such agreeable emotions, and, consequently, to be willing to lend a hand to promote it. Our love, however, is fully satisfied, though his prosperity should be brought about without our assistance. All that this passion desires is to see him happy, without regarding who was the author of his prosperity. But gratitude is not to be satisfied in this manner. If the person to whom we owe many obligations is made happy without our assistance, though it please our love, it does not content our gratitude. Till we have recompensed him, till we ourselves have been instrumental in promoting his happiness, we feel ourselves still loaded with that debt which his past services have laid upon us." The gratitude of the believing covenanter, excited by the loving kindness of God, will produce the same effects towards his divine Benefactor. His love will be pleased to see the glory of his heavenly Father displayed by the active exertions of others; but his gratitude will demand

to open its own mouth in shewing forth his praise. The favours connected with covenant obligation excite, in the well disposed mind, a sentiment of pure and exalted gratitude.

Minute as the privilege for which we contend may appear, it renders the giver the natural and approved object of gratitude. It is on the part of God, a renewed grant, and on the part of his people a renewed acceptance of all the blessings of the new covenant. By this descending obligation, ancestors have the delicious satisfaction of seeing their posterity secured in these blessings, as well as themselves. They trust, that the name of Jesus shall, by their deed, be transmitted, precious as the ointment poured forth, to their succeeding race; and that their humble names will, for his sake, be held in honourable and everlasting remembrance. They expect when generations yet unborn will arise and call them blessed. They look forward to future times, and see their successors walking in the fear of God, recognizing their obligations, renewing their vows, and treading in their steps, holy, happy, and prosperous. These were the prospects of Israel at Jordan, and these might reasonably be their feelings; for such their descendants proved, while they observed the covenant of their fathers. And all these blessings shall come on thee, said Moses to Israel at the renovation of their covenant, "if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God. Blessed shalt thou be in the city, and blessed shalt thou be in the field. Blessed shall be the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy ground, and the fruit of thy cattle, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep. Blessed shall be thy basket and thy store. Blessed shalt thou be when thou comest in, and blessed shalt thou be when thou goest out *." Such anticipations as these, resting on so sure a foundation, must produce a powerful effect upon the hearts and conduct of religious progenitors.

But this obligation is calculated to kindle and direct the gratitude of the children as well as of the fathers. That God was pleased to take our fathers into covenant with himself, and to comprehend us in the same federal transaction, is an affecting consideration. To guard us by obligations so awful against the commission of sin, and to oppose so strong a barrier to the misery which it produces, is to load us with a debt of gratitude, which the ingenuous Christian will be eager to acknowledge by a life of active goodness. The man who does not recompense his benefactor, when he has it in his power, and when his benefactor needs his assistance, is no doubt guilty of black ingratitude; but far more guilty is the covenanter, who is cold to the interest of God, and

* Deut. xxviii. 2—6.

and regardless of his glory. To every reflecting mind, such a character must be an object of the highest disapprobation.

The covenanter is impelled to duty by another obligation, which is still more powerful than that of gratitude: an obligation, the fulfilment of which may be extorted by force, and of which the violation, naturally awakens resentment, and exposes to condemnation and punishment. This is justice; and the violation of justice is injury. He has entered into a covenant which deeply interests the glory of God, and the salvation of men. To violate his engagements, is to do real and positive hurt to his neighbour, and to injure the declarative glory of God. Such conduct is the natural object of resentment and condemnation. Conscience tells him that force may be used with the utmost propriety to punish his transgression. Therefore he feels himself bound and obliged, in a peculiar manner, to the observation of justice, which requires him to fulfil those solemn engagements.

Breach of covenant is an act of injustice which exposes the violator to the agonies of remorse. It fills his mind with shame, on account of the impropriety of his conduct, with grief, for the effects of it, and with terror, for the deserved punishment. Perhaps there are no sufferings equal to those of remorse; none which make so deep an impression upon our mind and conduct. But that tremendous feeling, the worm which never dies, is the natural concomitant of covenant-violation. On the contrary, the man who discharges his obligations with integrity, enjoys a serenity and peace with which a stranger cannot intermeddle. Hence it is, that they who are deaf to the voice of almost every other obligation, submit to the call of justice, and perform their oaths. They fear the punishment which they know to be awaiting, and are allured by the sweet enjoyments of the upright soul. Thus, the obligation of a covenant, by seizing upon the strongest principles of our nature, stimulates to a life of active obedience. No other obligation with which we are acquainted, no consideration whatever, exerts so powerful and lasting an influence upon the mind. But the force of a descending obligation is still greater than a personal one. For as God, the great party in a religious covenant, cannot fail to perform his part, in blessing his faithful people according to his promise, the longer it has continued, and the more generations it has reached, the more numerous and decisive are the proofs which the covenanter obtains of the divine goodness and truth; and, consequently, the descendent has the greater inducement to active obedience, and the more reason to fear the violation of his engagement. This, accordingly, is one of the principal arguments which God condescends to use, when he warns his
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people of sin, of righteousness and of judgment. He threatens his ancient Israel with sore calamities, if they broke the covenant into which they had entered. "But, if you break my covenant, I also will do this unto you: I will even appoint over you terror, consumption, and the burning ague, that shall consume the eyes and cause sorrow of heart: and ye shall sow your seed in vain; for your enemies shall eat it*." The same argument Moses repeats and urges with great earnestness in his farewell address, part of which is expressed in these striking terms: "All nations shall say, Wherefore hath the Lord done this unto this land? What meaneth the heat of this great anger? Then men shall say, Because they have forsaken the covenant of the Lord God of their fathers†." When his ancient people neglected to obey his voice, he sent his angel to expostulate with them, and put them in mind of his covenant. "I said, I will never break my covenant with you. But ye have not obeyed my voice: why have ye done this?" The power of covenant obligation was clearly exemplified on this occasion. "And it came to pass, when the angel of the Lord spake these words unto all the children of Israel, that the people lifted up their voice and wept‡. After many generations, Jeremiah is sent to rebuke the disobedient Jews, and proclaim God's covenant. "Say thou unto them, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Cursed be the man that obeyeth not the words of this covenant which I commanded your fathers§." And, in fine, when the Apostles pressed the Jews to believe in Christ, this was still the argument which the Spirit of God employed. "Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, and in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed||."

2. This doctrine restores and confirms our confidence in the mercies of God. To create and establish confidence are among the principal uses of a covenant among men. Society cannot subsist without justice; and we cannot be sure of a man's justice but by his solemn engagements. To this contrivance we fly as the last refuge from the injustice of men; but after they have plighted their faith with the solemnity of an oath, no reasonable doubt of their fidelity can remain. So desirous is man to repose his trust upon covenanted veracity, that he spurns the suspicion of treachery, as ungenerous if not unjust, and blames himself for harbouring it for one moment: and it is not till after the clearest evidences of dishonesty, and the expence of a violent struggle with himself, that he can believe his neighbour capable of acting so wicked a

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* Lev. xvi. 14. † Deut. xxix. 20. ‡ Jud. ii. 1, 4. § Jer. xi. 1. || Acts iii. 25.

part as to violate such an obligation. These observations apply with equal propriety to the original contractors and their successors. The man whose estate is secured to him by solemn covenant, transmits his claim without fear to his heir, who enjoys it in perfect security, and leaves it with the same confidence to the generation following. Though there is no reason to question the veracity of God, yet, in gracious condescension to the weakness of his people, and that they might have a strong consolation, he has confirmed the exceeding great and precious promises with his oath. For the same reasons he entered into covenant with his church, and secured to the primary and succeeding generations of his people, all the blessings of eternal life. This proceeding of our Heavenly Father composes the troubled soul. When the backsliding Christian comes to himself, and thinks of returning to his Father's house, he is ready to be distracted with the apprehension that he will refuse him admittance, and banish him from his presence for ever: but the recollection of his covenant allays his fears, and inspires him with the hope that he is still waiting to be gracious, and will do as he hath said. In evil days, when the good man is perished out of the earth; and there is none upright among men; when the measure of iniquity is full, and the judge at the door, the mourner in Zion looks to God's covenant, and finds rest to his soul. Lest Israel should say, when they were scattered among the nations for their iniquity, there is no hope, Moses directs them to the covenant of their fathers. "When thou art in tribulation, and all these things are come upon thee, even in the latter days, if thou turn to the Lord thy God, and shalt be obedient unto his voice, (for the Lord thy God is a merciful God,) he will not forsake thee, neither destroy thee, nor forget the covenant of thy fathers, which he swore unto them*." It was the same covenant which animated the soul of Micah, and filled him, in the worst of times, with triumphant confidence in the future prosperity of Israel. "He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities: and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea. Thou wilt perform the truth to Jacob, and the mercy to Abraham, which thou hast sworn unto our fathers from the days of old†."

3. This obligation is a powerful argument in the mouth of the Christian at the throne of grace. May he not approach the Father of mercies and humbly put him in remembrance of his covenant, and earnestly plead the accomplishment? May he not venture to use the language of filial expostulation; Wilt thou not return and revive us again? Wilt thou not regard thine own glory? Why should the heathen say, Where

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* Deut. iv. 31, 32.

† Mic. vii. 19, 20.

is their God? Our iniquities are many, our provocations are great, and thy displeasure is just: but when thou didst enter into covenant with thy people thou didst proclaim thy name, the Lord, the Lord God merciful and gracious. For such pleadings, we have the example of an inspired Prophet. On the footing of the Abrahamic covenant, Jeremiah earnestly pleaded the cause of offending Israel. While he was deeply affected with the approaching calamities of his country, and still more with their immoveable security and stupidity, he receives a commandment from God to pour out the distress of his soul in their presence, that they might be roused to make use of the same language, and offer up the same petitions which the Divine wisdom dictated to the Prophet on that occasion. After describing, in very tender and affecting terms, the miseries which the sword, the famine, and the pestilence, were soon to bring upon them, he draws near to intercede with God in their behalf. He humbly expostulates with him concerning their present deplorable condition; he acknowledges the wickedness of his people; he deprecates the Divine anger, and appeals to the honour and the promise of Israel's covenanted God. "Hast thou utterly rejected Judah? Hath thy soul loathed Zion? Why hast thou smitten us, and there is no healing for us—do not abhor us, for thy name's sake; do not disgrace the throne of thy glory: remember, break not thy covenant with us*." This intercession accords with a promise which God gave to Israel in the wilderness; "If then their uncircumcised hearts be humbled, and they then accept of the punishment of their iniquity; then will I remember my covenant with Jacob, and also my covenant with Isaac, and also my covenant with Abraham will I remember†."

4. God spares his offending people for the sake of the covenant which he made with their fathers. When God revealed to Moses the captivity of Israel, he promised to remember his covenant, and not make a full end of them in the day of his anger. "And yet for all that, when they be in the land of their enemies, I will not cast them away, neither will I abhor them to destroy them utterly, and to break my covenant with them: for I am the Lord their God. But I will, for their sakes, remember the covenant of their ancestors, whom I brought forth out of the land of Egypt, in the sight of the heathen, that I might be their God: I am the Lord‡." God saw that the sins of his people would accumulate till it would be necessary to call them to account, and to punish them according to their deserts. But the co-

* Jer. xiv. 17—21.

† Lev. xxvi. 40.

‡ Veric 44. 45.

venant of their fathers stood in the way and prolonged the day of mercy.

“And the Lord was gracious unto them, and had compassion on them, and had respect unto them, because of his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and would not destroy them, neither cast he them from his presence as yet *.” The singular appearances of Divine Providence, in favour of the British Isles, have been often and generally remarked. While the nations of the Continent have been frequently convulsed, we have lived in profound tranquillity, and laughed at the shaking of the spear. If the destroying angel has, at any time, visited this land, he has been soon commanded to put up his sword into the scabbard; and the incipient calamity was extinguished. When our iniquities provoked the Lord to threaten us with scarcity or famine, he quickly repented him of the evil, and rained down plenty about our habitations. When the distant settlements of Britain were wasted with the scourge of war, or the sweeping pestilence, no evil has been permitted to come near our dwellings. And, when the enemy threatened to invade and disturb our repose, He that sits King upon the floods, blew with his wind, and they were scattered, they sank as lead in the mighty waters. It was not the ocean which surrounds us, it was not the number and prowess of our fleets and armies, nor the wisdom of our councils, but the sword of the Lord, and the buckler of his favour, that saved us. The means of salvation are withheld or taken away from the rest of the nations, or suffered to continue in a very imperfect state; but among us, the everlasting gospel has been preserved, and dispensed with great purity, for many ages. To us, the words of the Psalmist are remarkably applicable; “He sheweth his word unto Jacob, his statutes and his judgments unto Israel. He hath not dealt so with any nation: and as for his judgments they have not known them.” But far from being better than our neighbours, no nation ever treated the most solemn engagements to the service of God with the insolence of Britain. Our apostasy has been as singular as our privileges have been great and permanent. Other nations may be as vile in their principles, and as flagitious in their conduct; perhaps some may have outrun us in the career of iniquity; but what people were favoured with our advantages? And it would be no difficult task to show, that though we have long been lifted up to heaven, in point of wickedness we scarcely yield to the most profligate nation on earth. To what then must our great and lasting prosperity be owing? We believe, it has been great-
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* 2 Kings xiii. 23.

ly owing to the covenants of our fathers, to which a faithful and gracious God has hitherto had respect.

5. The obligation of our fathers' covenants recognized and felt, serves to keep up the remembrance of the great and glorious things which God has done for our land. The covenant which God made with Abraham and renewed with Israel at Sinai, David exhorts his people to remember; and couples it with the commemoration of the wonders which the most High had done for their nation. "Sing unto him, sing psalms unto him, talk ye of all his wondrous works. Be ye mindful always of his covenant, the word which he commanded to a thousand generations*." To record the wonderful works of God is a reasonable, a delightful, and a commanded duty. "Remember his marvellous works that he hath done, his wonders and the judgments of his mouth, O ye seed of Israel his servant, ye children of Jacob his chosen ones." How glorifying to God this duty is, may be seen by the memorials which he appointed among his ancient people to perpetuate the remembrance of the passage of Jordan†: And how provoking the forgetfulness of men, from the severe rebukes and heavy denunciations of his anger‡. The religious covenants of our fathers were struck in troublous times. They were preceded, attended, and followed, by many singular providences both of mercy and of judgment. It is no less our duty to remember the doings of the Lord, than it was the duty of Israel. But, if we do not take the same view of their covenant, as David did of that which God made with his fathers, we will soon forget the appearances of Divine Providence in their and our behalf. If we consider them as a detached race of men, with whom we have now little or nothing to do, the singular scenes which they witnessed, and in which they acted so conspicuous a part, will be viewed in the same light. They will soon be treated with contempt, or, if recollected at all, will become the scorn of the foolish or fiery partizan. The suspicion is well founded; for this has long been precisely the state of the public mind upon this subject. Many of those who profess to be the friends of religion, are heard to exclaim, "It is a matter of no moment to us, whether their proceedings in that period were right or wrong, since nothing but the Apostles and Prophets (Christ Jesus himself being the chief corner stone) are the foundation of the Christian church." Who are desirous to lay the Reformers and their proceedings as a foundation to the Christian church? But are we not to record the wonders which God has done for his church in former times; and are we not to be followers of the saints?

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* 2 Chron. xvi. 9, 15.

† Josh. iv. 7.

‡ Is. xvii. 10, 11.

But how shall we obey these commandments, if we disregard the arm of Jehovah, and the zealous and faithful contendings of his servants? Rather than suffer the hated yoke of federal obligation, they will renounce all interest in the mercies of ancient days; they will confine their view to the contracted span of their own generation. But the covenanter, recognizing the obligation of his fathers' religious vows, must behold those remote transactions with tender concern. He searches them out and records them in the tablet of his heart. He talks of them with holy and generous emotion to his children, saying, Come and I will tell what I have heard and known, and my fathers have told me. I will not hide them from my children, shewing to the generation to come the praises of the Lord, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done *. Though they are the song of the drunkard and the derision of the fool, they animate the soul of the genuine covenanter in the house of his pilgrimage, and furnish him matter of spiritual rejoicing in the presence of God. Praise ye the Lord. I will praise the Lord with my whole heart in the assembly of the upright, and in the congregation. The works of the Lord are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein. His work is honourable and glorious: and his righteousness endureth for ever. He hath made his wonderful works to be remembered: the Lord is gracious and full of compassion. He hath given meat unto them that fear him: he will ever be mindful of his covenant †.

6. This obligation promotes a spirit of enquiry. The covenants of our fathers, and all proceedings of a similar nature, are falsely charged with damping the active powers of the mind. The commandment of the Apostle to the churches never can be superseded, and should be daily observed: "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God ‡." The obligation of our fathers' covenants seconds the authority of this precept, by creating a desire to know what we are bound to observe or avoid. As we never can be bound to adhere to any article which contradicts revelation, if our inquiries be carried on with suitable humility and candour, we may prosecute them without hesitation. The result will ever, by the blessing of God, be favourable to truth. The excellence of the church's former attainments will be more clearly seen, and more justly appreciated; the mistakes which may be discovered in her profession will be rectified; and the chasms will be filled up. Thus, a descending obligation promotes reformation both in faith and practice. These are certainly the effects which civil obligations produce. Most persons will be eager to know the

* Ps. lxxviii. 1, &c.

† Ps. cxi. 1—5.

‡ 1 John iv. 1.

the contents of those contracts which have devolved upon them by the death of their progenitors. They will enquire, when they succeed to the inheritance of their fathers, whether any engagements exist, and what is their nature ; lest, by neglecting or transgressing them, they expose themselves to the loss of reputation or property. The same must have been the effect which the Sinaitic covenant produced among the people of Israel. When they saw it exerting its obligation upon every succeeding generation ; when they beheld the Jewish nation happy or miserable, as they attended to its requirements ; and when they found that the transgression of every individual was liable to be punished, till his field became a desolation, and his house a dung-hill, they must have felt a powerful inclination to inquire what were the articles of this awful transaction.

7. This obligation promotes the unity of the church. The Sinaitic covenant embraced all the generations of Israel, and consolidated them into one society. The covenantor who believes and acts upon this doctrine, will not view himself as a solitary individual, and the religious society to which he belongs as a detached body, which has, according to the modern opinion, little concern with ancestors, or their profession ; but as a portion of a current society, connected by ties, of an intimate and endearing kind, both with the past and with the future. He looks back to his fathers who have entered into their rest, and is fired with a noble ambition to emulate them in the career of righteousness. He looks forward with joyful eyes into futurity, and welcomes the embryo generations of the godly, which he descries in long succession, advancing to the borders of time, and entering, in their turn, upon the scene which he is soon to leave. Thus, a descending obligation, by giving a wider range to the religious exercises and feelings of the Christian ; by enlarging, enriching, and adorning his prospects ; by connecting more closely the members of the church and the ways of Providence respecting their salvation, opens new sources of enjoyment, and, at once, increases the sum of happiness to men, and of glory to God.

C H A P. II.

THE COVENANTS OF OUR FATHERS IN THIS COUNTRY BINDING UPON THEIR POSTERITY.

SOME may be disposed to admit the obligation of religious covenants upon Posterity in New Testament times, who deny that the oaths of our reforming Fathers extend their influence to their successors. Though friendly to the character and general proceedings of our renowned progenitors, they believe that their covenants contain articles which are contrary to the word of God, and exhibit an undue mixture of civil and religious matters. The application which was made to the civil Powers for supporting and promoting the ends of those engagements, together with the confiscations which a number of recusants were made to suffer, have confirmed their scruples, and created such violent disgust, that, without attempting to separate the precious from the vile, that which accords with the will of God from that which he forbids, they resolutely reject, as unlawful, the whole obligation. These things we propose candidly to investigate, and hope to shew, if the doctrine advanced in the former chapter be true, that, notwithstanding some blemishes, those dreaded engagements are still in force.

S E C T. I.

RISE AND PROGRESS OF THE REFORMATION IN SCOTLAND TILL THE SWEARING OF THE NATIONAL COVENANT.

OUR renowned Fathers possessed, in an eminent degree, the principal excellencies which enlightened and adorned the leading members of the congregation of Israel, when that people entered into covenant at Sinai. It is their honour to have always been an abhorrence to the infidel, the profligate, and the friends of tyranny, who spare no pains to misrepresent their conduct, to exaggerate their faults, and to blacken their character. From persons of such a description this is to be expected, and is no contemptible proof of the goodness of their cause, and the propriety of their measures; but, for almost a century past, and

especially of late, the sober and religious part of the community have, in general, gone over to the same side, and joined in reproaching the men, who restored and confirmed the liberties of church and state. The Reformers rose and stood forth the defenders of their oppressed country, in dangerous and trying times—times, when their ungrateful traducers of the present day would have shrunk behind them for protection, or crept into the hiding places of the earth. They displayed, in the arduous struggle, a courage and intrepidity which neither numbers nor power could dismay; and a patience and fortitude, in prosecuting their cause, which their enemies could not overcome. Their penetration and vigilance discovered, and their wisdom and vigour defeated, every plot which was formed against them. Their faithfulness to God, to their country, and to one another, and even to the cruel and tyrannical house of Stuart, whose proceedings, as authentic history records, were a continual violation of the nation's rights, has had few examples in ancient or modern times. Deliberate and sagacious in council, fruitful in resources, prompt in action, eloquent in the Parliament and Assembly House, heroic in the field of battle, neither too much elated with success, nor dejected by adversity, ever desirous of peace consistent with their liberties civil and religious, they avenged the injured rights of their country and of human nature, upon a despotic and perfidious race of men. Their religious and moral qualities were not less remarkable than their intellectual endowments and personal exertions: and these were not confined to a few leading men in the church and the state, but were displayed by a far greater number, in every rank of society, than this nation ever possessed either before or since. Purity of manners, and attention to religious duties, were uncommonly prevalent among all descriptions of men. The clergy were faithful, and the people were regular. The nobility were not then ashamed of being sober; they counted it their honour to be followers of Jesus, and by their example to provoke their inferiors to a just and holy life. The names of an Argyle, a Balmerino, a Rothes, a Loudon, a Johnstone, and many others, will be held in precious remembrance, so long as a real friend to true religion and genuine liberty remains in this country. The pen of the impartial historian will transmit them to the remotest generations, a memorable example to the oppressor and the oppressed, and objects of admiration to the good and the worthy.

But, they were men of like passions with ourselves. They were surrounded with temptations many and great; their minds were goaded with incessant provocations; their sensibility was racked with the imminent danger of losing their lives, their property, their liberty, and

their religion. It is unjust to expect from them, in these circumstances, the same even tenor of conduct, as from those who occupy the secure and peaceful retreat, and enjoy the cool of the day. Dark spots are visible to every eye on the face of the moon, even when she walks in her brightness. It would be uncandid to alledge that they always thought and acted as they ought. That there was no false patriot among them, no supple time-server, no hypocritical professor, is not pretended. Time discovered not a few. Nor is it denied, that many religious and honest men yielded, at times, to the solicitations of selfish and worldly inclinations; and that the merciful man, sometimes forgetting the benign spirit of the gospel, was betrayed into measures of unrighteous severity. In their situation, such blemishes were unavoidable by sinful and fallible men. It ought rather to appear surprising, that the prejudices of their education, their habits of thinking, their continual and pressing dangers, and other circumstances, did not hurry them into still greater faults.

But it is not contended that any thing in their public proceedings is obligatory upon us but their covenants; and only those parts of them which are of a moral and eternal nature. Whatever is discovered in them contrary to the word of God, cannot be binding upon any. And, whatever indifferent circumstance is by their oath turned into a duty, is binding on future generations only as it corresponds with their existing circumstances. For, it was in this manner only, that, under the direction of inspired prophets, the succeeding congregations of Israel recognized and renewed the covenants of their fathers. But to form a distinct notion of the nature, use, and end of these federal engagements, and, consequently, how far they are binding on posterity, it is necessary to review the proceedings of those days.

In the year 1527 the Reformation dawned in Scotland. By the zealous exertions of a resolute band of martyrs, the knowledge of the truth was rapidly diffused over all the country. They went every where preaching the gospel, and had the satisfaction to see their labours and sufferings rewarded with the conversion of multitudes from the superstition of Rome. After the death of James the Fifth, his Queen Dowager, Mary of Lorraine, having assumed the reins of government, determined to restore and maintain the interests of the Holy See. But it was now too late. The Sun of righteousness had risen; and the Regent's arm was too short and weak to stop his course. From the very beginning of the Reformation a great number of the Nobility, Barons, and Gentlemen, "offered themselves willingly among the people." In promoting that good cause, tumult and faction had no
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share; or were opposed the moment they appeared. The Reformers tried every peaceable measure they could devise, consistent with their duty to God and to themselves, before they employed force; and had recourse to arms, only in their own defence against the hostile attacks of the Queen-regent. Gradually instructed in the knowledge of the true religion, they conceived a strong and just aversion to Popery, and resolved to use their utmost efforts to have the gospel preached, the sacraments purely administered, and superstition, idolatry, and tyranny suppressed.

For this end, some eminent persons travelled over all the shires of Scotland, exhorting the people to embrace the true religion, and to assist one another in its defence. They carried along with them forms of association in writing, to be subscribed by those who inclined. They agreed that the brethren, in every town should, at certain times, meet together for prayer and reading the scriptures, till they were provided with preachers. These endeavours were so efficacious, that in a few months, elders were appointed, by common election; and the reformed church of Scotland began to assume a regular form.

The Reformers, laying their account with the greatest severities for these proceedings, met at Edinburgh the 3d December 1557, and entered into a covenant to promote the Reformation, and to support one another in professing the truth.

In this obligation our Fathers did nothing to deserve censure. The scripture clearly requires us to obey God rather than man; to embrace the cause of Christ, and to promote it by every scriptural method, to the utmost of our power. Their native country groaned under a galling yoke of oppression. Was it not a duty which they owed to God, to their country, and to themselves, to relieve it, even at the risk of their lives and possessions? When they vowed to support one another in doing the will of God, did they more than the Apostolic churches, who screened, who conveyed away the first propagators of the gospel from the fury of lawless power, and who provided for their mutual safety by every lawful means? They did not draw the sword, till every peaceable measure was exhausted, and till the sword of their implacable foe was at their throat, and the constitutional laws of their country were trampled under foot: and when they did appear in arms, it was not to propagate their principles, but to defend their lives.

The Queen-regent exasperated at the rapid progress of the Reformation, and the failure of all her schemes to prevent it, determined to crush it by the strong arm of power. Under pretence of punishing the town of Perth for the demolition of some mass-houses, which her no-

torious perfidy had procured, she marched an army against the Protestants. But the numbers, activity, and resolution of the Reformers compelled her to defer her purpose, and come to an agreement. She gave her promise that none of the Townsmen should be injured for what they had done; that they should be allowed the free exercise of their religion; and that she should withdraw her troops immediately. But the Lords of the Congregation justly suspecting her promises, and fearing the dangers to which they were still exposed, agreed upon another Bond for mutual assistance. This Writing was subscribed at Perth on the 31st May 1559. In this deed they bound themselves anew to mutual assistance in doing the will of God according to the scriptures. The observations made upon the former obligation fully apply to this proceeding. They did nothing worthy of blame, but acted the part of faithful Christians and good subjects.

The Queen had no sooner entered Perth, than she broke the agreement, with the Reformers, in every article. She filled the town with her popish mercenaries, and distressed the inhabitants with fines, with imprisonments, and with murders. After various changes in her affairs, she thought proper to conclude a new agreement with the Lords of the Congregation; and among other things, promised them again the free exercise of their religion. The Congregation, however, knowing her systematic and incurable treachery, and fearing that she still harboured designs of blood, and would seize the first opportunity to destroy them, immediately, after the treaty was finished, entered into a new Bond, suitable to their circumstances, for their mutual defence in maintaining the true religion. For this end, they solemnly engaged, that none of them should correspond with the Queen, by letters or otherwise, without the knowledge and consent of the rest; and that, as soon as a letter should come from her, to any one of them, he should not delay to communicate the intelligence to the whole Congregation. This Bond was subscribed at Stirling on the first day of August 1559, and was become indispensibly necessary to defeat the secret and deceitful methods which Mary employed to divide and ruin them. In swearing this article, they did nothing but their duty. The scripture required them to embrace the gospel of Christ, and to promote it with one consent. "Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing*." To be faithful to God, and to one another in well-doing, is a duty no less plain and urgent; "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life†." Of these duties the first Christians were shining examples; "And they continued

* Phil. iii. 16.

† Rev. iii. 10.

continued stedfastly in the Apostles doctrine and fellowship ;"—“ And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul *.”

The Queen-regent, steady to her purpose of exterminating the friends of the Reformation, and disregarding all her promises, continued to harass them, by plundering and laying waste their possessions. The Lords were again compelled to have recourse to arms in their own defence. Finding their power and numbers considerably encreased, the greater part of the nation in their interest, and that the Regent could not be bound by any tie, they called a great assembly of the Nobility, Barons, and Burghesses, and solemnly deprived her of the Regency †.

By the singular blessing of Heaven, they triumphed at last over all opposition, and eluded all the snares of their enemies. To consolidate the friends of the Reformation into one body, and to bind them together by strict and indissoluble ties, and to put the finishing hand to their civil and religious security, for which they had so long and earnestly contended, they entered into another Covenant at Leith, on the 27th day of April 1560. They engaged, as formerly, to maintain and promote the reformation of religion to the utmost of their power ; to assert the liberties of their country, by expelling the French soldiers who garrisoned Leith for the Queen Dowager, and grievously oppressed them ; to regard the common cause as the cause of every one of them in particular ; and the cause of every one, being lawful and honest, as the cause of them all in general.

The article in this formula concerning the expulsion of the French mercenaries, and the recovery of their ancient liberties, was peculiar to the circumstances of our Fathers at that time, and can exert no obligation upon their posterity. But it contains two branches of duty of a moral and general nature, which may be admitted into a religious covenant with perfect propriety. The sixth commandment requires us
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* Acts ii. 42, 46. and iv. 32.

† “ In the Democratical genius of the Scottish Constitution, in the importance which distinguished the people from the earliest times, there is the strongest vindication of this measure. Limited by laws, magistrates not despots, even the Monarchs of Scotland themselves, when they presumed to invade the rights of the nation, were exposed to the resistance and correction of the subject. The indignant people might vindicate their privileges and honours. Upon slight transgressions, they alarm the fears of their prince ; and repress, by remonstrance, the intoxication of their grandeur. Upon great occasions, and in the hard moments of tyranny, they might yield to the fulness of their resentments and their wrongs ; making him a sacrifice to justice, and an instruction to posterity,—conduct him from the throne to the scaffold.”
Stuart, p. 148.

to use all lawful endeavours for our own and the preservation of others; but what God requires in his word, we may lawfully swear, in his strength, to perform, when the voice of Divine Providence calls. It is also the duty of Christians to endeavour, by all lawful means, to restore and secure that degree of civil liberty which is necessary for the free and unrestrained profession of the true religion. These two duties are certainly intended in what may be called the civil part of this form, to which, viewed in this light, we can see no reasonable objection. When the acquisition of civil liberty is inserted in a religious covenant as a co-ordinate article, we cannot but consider it as an improper mixture of civil and religious matters. Liberty is of so much account, in the sight of God, that he condescends to direct the Christian slave to prefer it to a state of bondage; but it is of so small a price, when compared to the enjoyments of religion, as to be unworthy of regret. "Art thou called, being a servant, or slave? care not for it; but if thou mayest be made free, use it rather*." To place it in the same rank with the gospel in a religious covenant must, then, be unwarrantable, but to assign it a subordinate station as a means to the end, is, on many occasions, both lawful and necessary. In the form under review, it must be acknowledged, that it has too much the appearance of a co-ordinate article. It teaches the nations, however, in what manner to resist in cases of extreme and habitual oppression;—a lesson which their descendents practised with complete success at the memorable Revolution; and repeated at the accession of the present Family to the throne of these kingdoms.

At Edinburgh, on the 20th December 1560, the first General Assembly of the church of Scotland sat down; not by the invitation or command of the Prince, but by the church's own intrinsic power. The third Assembly which met in June 1562, found the country still in danger from Popery, from the want of reformed ministers, and from the bigotry of Mary, who was now returned from France. Mr John Knox, and Mr George Hay, were appointed Commissioners to visit the counties of Galloway and Air, which were exposed to greatest danger. Roused by the pathetic exhortations of the zealous Knox, a great part of the Barons, Gentlemen, and Burgeesses of the West, assembled at Air, and entered into an oath to promote the true religion, to maintain the ministers of the gospel, and to defend one another, in all lawful and just actions.

Our ancestors continued to struggle against Popery and arbitrary power, but without renewing their covenants, till the year 1580. Mary had

* 1 Cor. vii. 21.

had been forced to resign her crown and kingdom to her son James the Sixth, who had accepted the government, and been proclaimed with great solemnity. From the moment of his accession, he discovered a strong inclination to intrench upon the power of the General Assembly; convinced that he could never obtain the great object of his pursuit, unlimited power, while Presbyterian government existed in the church. His disputes with the Assembly, together with his fond attachment for a Popish lord, the Earl of Lennox, revived and inflamed the popular discontents. To quiet these agitations, Lennox made a public and solemn abjuration of the Romish religion in one of the churches of Edinburgh. But the jealousies of the people were re-kindled by a prevailing report, that the Pope had granted dispensations to his votaries, to say or do any thing, however heretical, provided they were still attached in their hearts to the interests of Rome. Informed of this, James ordered one of his preachers, Mr John Craig, to compose the short Confession of Faith, commonly called the first National Covenant of Scotland, in opposition to all the corruptions of Popery, and particularly to Papal dispensations. This Bond was publicly sworn and subscribed by the King, and by his Court and Council. Next year the Assembly adopted the measure, and recommended it to the nation, who, obedient to their call, and eager to imitate the royal example, pressed forward to subscribe it.

They renewed the National Covenant in the year 1590, as a solemn testimony of their gratitude to the God of Heaven for their signal deliverance from the Spanish Armada, and other imminent dangers. On this occasion they subscribed a Bond, adapted to the circumstances of the church and nation, in which the Covenanters engaged to defend the Protestant religion and the authority of their Sovereign. They renewed it a second time in 1596. This is a year much to be remembered in the history of the Reformation. The Church had now arrived at her greatest degree of purity. Adorned with the beauties of holiness, she looked forth as the morning, the delight of the Protestant, and the terror of the Antichristian world. On Tuesday the 30th of March, the General Assembly, without any mandate or invitation from the King or the Parliament, deeply affected with the designs of the Papists at home and abroad, and after acknowledging, with many tears, their breach of former vows, renewed the National Covenant with great solemnity. But this bright and happy period quickly passed away, and was succeeded by a long and dismal course of apostasy and corruption. James prevailed, by intrigues and flattery, to turn many aside from the pure institutions of Christ. He restrained ministerial freedom; he packed the General Assemblies, that they might be the echo of his sovereign will.

will. Churchmen were introduced into Parliament, and invested with the title and power of Bishops. The Scottish Inquisition, or High Commission Court, was erected to excommunicate, fine, and imprison all whose religious principles or manners were offensive to them. A number of superstitious ceremonies were introduced into the worship of God, by the authority of his Assembly; and the whole system was afterwards ratified by Act of Parliament.

When Charles I. ascended the throne, he entered fully into his father's views. Tutored in the school of bigotry and absolute power, he prosecuted the establishment of Episcopacy in Scotland with the fervent enthusiasm of a bigot, and the unrelenting severity of a despot. Intoxicated with the notions of unlimited and irresistible prerogative, he disdained to model the Assembly and direct their proceedings as his weak and timid father had done; but imposed upon the Church whatever he thought proper. He began by requiring the punctual observation of a book of canons, which were designed to overturn the Presbyterian constitution, and to form the church of Scotland entirely upon the model of the English church. The next imposition was the Book of common prayer, which, instead of the simple and impressive forms of Presbyterian worship, introduced the same dull round of morning and evening prayers, litanies, collects, lessons, confessions, absolutions, responses, amens, creeds, and pater-nosters. This violent change effectually opened the eyes of the nation, and produced a strong sensation in their minds. The sparks of discontent which had been smothered for many years, suddenly burst into an irresistible flame. All was uproar and confusion. This tumultuous movement of the people, which the enlightened Presbyterians condemned and deplored, was followed by a regular, deliberate, firm, and persevering opposition to the measures of the Court. The Noblemen, Gentlemen, Burgeſſes, and Ministers, having petitioned in vain for a redress of grievances, in vain complained and protested; and finding their legal and peaceable meetings forbidden under pain of treason, met at Edinburgh, and resolved to renew the National Covenant. The Writing made out for that purpose, consisted of three parts. The first was a copy of the National Covenant; the second was a list of the various Acts of Parliament in favour of the Reformation; and the third was an accommodation of the Covenant to their circumstances, containing a disapprobation of the government of the church by diocesan bishops, and an engagement against the practice of the ceremonies in religious worship. This Covenant was sworn in February 1638, and in a very short time was subscribed by all the kingdom, in spite of the mandates and proclamations of the civil power,

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and at the risk of the heaviest vengeance which the despotic and enraged Charles could inflict. Here civil pains had no place. The ministers, who administered the covenant, used no other arguments to persuade people to take it, than such as were drawn from the word of God. So far from employing force, though the arm of the nation was at their call, they refused the proffered subscriptions of some persons of considerable rank, till time should prove the sincerity of their professions.

S E C T. II.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS ON THE NATIONAL COVENANT.

1. THE National Covenant was preceded by a regular and steady appearance for civil and religious liberty. The histories of that important period which have the least pretensions to impartiality, incontrovertibly prove that their proceedings were never dishonoured by tumult and confusion. Popular commotions there certainly were ; but the Covenanters never offered to justify them, either to the King or their fellow subjects. Whenever a spirit of riot appeared, it was suppressed by the exertions of the magistrates and respectable part of the people ; and exposed by the ministers from the pulpit. The Privy Council itself, after a strict inquiry into the tumult of the 23d July 1637, at reading the service-book in the churches of Edinburgh, fully exculpated, in their letter to the King, the great body of the citizens, and laid the blame upon the dregs of the people., “ To call, as some do, a set of men, of whom the greater part were highly distinguished for rank, education, the love of God, and of their country, a tumultuous combination, while it is not shewn that they acted contrary to the principles of equity ; to call such a set of patriots by so reproachful an appellation, from the circumstance, merely, of their being in opposition to the King, is a base partiality which none will excuse, but those whose ignorance of the rights of mankind fits them to receive the slavish doctrines of passive obedience and non-resistance.”

2. Our renowned ancestors contended for the most important object. Civil and Religious Liberty, the birth-right of men, involving the dearest rights of human kind, and their sweetest consolations both in this world and in the next, and together with them the glory of God as their Maker and Redeemer ;—these were their aim. If any

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thing deserves to be called important among men ; if any thing should awake and inflame the strongest energies of the mind, it is this. But, they contended about modes of worship ; and for this unpardonable crime, their well-earned reputation must die. And, for what else did Charles contend ? They, in opposition to the will of only one man, insisted to judge for themselves in matters of religion ; and he to establish his own sovereign pleasure, in opposition to the just rights and privileges of a whole nation. If they acted unreasonably ; he much more. But, they contended for much more than modes of worship ; they contended also for matters of faith, and for the established laws and liberties of their nation, which their enemies sought to bury in the same grave. To the profane world, it must be confessed, that the religious matters for which our fathers contended, never can appear important. To them, every thing is trifling, but animal gratification. But some there are who know, with the highest degree of certainty, that their true happiness lies in communion with that God who made and who redeemed them. They know that God's word and ordinances are the means of that communion, without which it can neither be obtained nor preserved. We are not to wonder that persons of this persuasion, earnestly contend for the purity of divine ordinances. These are the wells of salvation which contain the water of life ; the glass in which the glory of God is seen ; the green pastures where the hungry feed, and the weary lie down : and can we wonder at their lively concern for the purity of these institutions ? They behold a spiritual beauty and glory in the genuine appointments of Christ, to which the most ingenious devices of men can never attain. They are persuaded that the honour of their Lord's name is deeply concerned in the manner of religious worship. To serve him by means which he has not appointed, is to offer him an indignity which the most pious intentions can never excuse, and which he is still as ready to punish as in the days of Nadab and Abihu. But, to them the honour of their Lord is dearer than all things. In fine, they know that one deviation from the rule of God's word, however small, opens into the path which leads to total apostasy. These considerations led our excellent fathers to oppose, with all their might, the first appearances of unscriptural rites in the worship of God *.

3. Our ancestors regarded the duty of Public Covenanting as an ordinance of the Church. That the National Covenant was regarded as a religious ordinance, appears from the immediate end of it, the reformation of religion ; from the writings of the Covenanters in defence of it, which always represent it as a covenant with God, and

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* Anderson's Essays.

not with man only ; from its administration by ministers on the Lord's day, or on days of solemn humiliation ; but especially from the matter of it, in which the following particulars deserve our attention.

In the beginning we have these remarkable words, expressing, in the strongest manner, the profession which our fathers made of receiving the truth as it is in Jesus, with faith and love. " We believe with our hearts, confess with our mouths, subscribe with our hands, and constantly affirm before God and the whole world, that this only is the true Christian faith and religion, pleasing to God, and bringing salvation to man, which now is by the mercy of God, revealed to the world by the preaching of the blessed evangel ;—to which we willingly agree, in our consciences, in all points, as to God's undoubted truth and verity, grounded only upon his written word."

" In the next place, our ancestors go on to specify the Popish errors which they solemnly renounced. In the present age, the common people do not understand many of the terms here used. But we are to consider, that church-members had occasion, at that time, to be much better versed in the Popish controversy, than they are now. It was only a few years before that they had themselves been practising the evils here abjured. Besides, they had been accustomed to hear their ministers laying open and refuting the errors of Popery almost every Lord's day. The confessions of faith too, and the religious treatises written at that time were, for the most part, taken up in exposing the abominations of Popery. Even in our own times, professors can give some account of the manifold sectaries which at present infest the church. And may we not suppose our forefathers (while yet far from that indifference to the concerns of religion which hath seized on this generation) to have been much better acquainted with that which was almost the only species of false religion, against which they had then to contend."

" Some think it strange, that our forefathers should have mentioned the decrees, made at Trent, in a bond which the common people were to subscribe. But it should be remembered that the council of Trent was then a reigning subject of conversation. We have reason to believe the Protestant ministers would give their people all the information about that council which was necessary for maintaining a Testimony against it. They would shew them that whatever the Popish party might pretend, or whatever some of the well-meaning bishops that attended it might look for, the real design of that council was for the ruin of the Protestant cause, and for the confirmation of the errors and

abominations of Antichrist. Such a testimony was absolutely necessary at that time, in regard that the Papists were continually boasting of their pretended general council, comparing it with the most venerable councils of antiquity; insisting that its decrees ought to be held as binding upon all Christians; and charging the Protestants with inexcusable obstinacy, because they would not submit to those decrees. It was, therefore, at that time a necessary branch of the testimony of Protestants, to abjure the authority of the council of Trent."

Farther, that our ancestors meant that persons should take the National Covenant as church-members, is clear from the evangelical character which the Covenanters bear. They are persons "whose God is the Lord: they are not moved with any worldly respect, but are persuaded only in their conscience; through the knowledge and love of God's true religion, imprinted in their hearts by the Holy Spirit." It is only in the character of believers, or of those who partake of Christ and all his saving benefits, that we can give ourselves to the Lord in a covenant of duties: and surely it well becomes believers and partakers of Christ to use these words. At that time there were no disputes among Protestants about the nature of faith. They unanimously held, in opposition to the general doubtful faith of the Papists, that it is an application of Christ and his benefits to ourselves in particular; among which benefits is the imprinting of the knowledge and love of the true religion by the Holy Spirit. It is true, carnal men could not consistently swear the National Covenant: nor can they consistently pray or receive the sacraments: for these, and indeed every ordinance of the church of Christ, must be observed in the way of depending on Christ as the Lord our righteousness and strength; a dependence to which natural men are absolute strangers. The truth is, if we are to reprobate a religious duty, only because a deceived heart will be so absurd as to draw false conclusions about the state of persons before God, from the profession that they necessarily make in such a duty; What would follow? For the beautiful system of Christian duties and ordinances, we would be presented with an universal blank.

The Covenanters promise to abide by this profession all the days of their lives, as they would not endanger "both soul and body in the day of God's fearful judgment." Some such imprecation is expressed or implied in all oaths. It is highly proper here; not that Covenanters were to entertain a slavish fear of hell; but because the ground they here profess to stand upon is the only ground of our salvation; because they might assure themselves that the Lord would enable them, according to his word, to perform their vows; and, lastly, because it ex-

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presses the desire and resolution to walk in the Lord's way ; with which honest covenanters ought to be animated *.

S E C T. III.

OBJECTIONS TO THE NATIONAL COVENANT CONSIDERED.

I. "THESE covenants are only of men's making, and therefore cannot be binding on posterity." The objector allows that the covenant at Horeb embraced all the generations of Israel ; but it was the "Covenant which the Lord God made with their fathers." There is not the least mention of any covenant of their fathers which they broke. "Surely, there is a great difference between God making a covenant with, or covenant-grant to his church, when he gives them his laws, statutes, and ordinances, and including posterity therein, and men's covenants, including posterity in like manner, under the New Testament."

And is it indeed true that the covenanting under the Old Testament, consisted only in "God's making a covenant with his people?" It consisted also in their entering into covenant with him. They did so in the very same manner that Christians do now. For, when Moses came and called for the elders of Israel, and laid before them all the words which the Lord commanded him, all the people answered together and said, "All that the Lord hath spoken we will do." Their reply is entirely equivalent to the church's entering into covenant, according to his commandment under the New Testament. When this covenant was renewed at Jordan, the agency of the church is expressed in the strongest terms : "Ye stand this day all of you, before the Lord your God, that thou shouldest enter into covenant with the Lord thy God, and into his oath which the Lord thy God maketh with thee this day.—Thou hast avouched the Lord this day to be thy God †." They are not simply received, nor is there a law simply issued ; but God makes a covenant with his chosen Israel, and they enter into covenant with him. The same language is used in describing the future renovations of that covenant. In the reign of Asa, "they entered into a covenant to seek the Lord God of their fathers." At the accession of Joash to the throne of David, "Jehoiada made a covenant between the Lord and the king and the people ; that they should be the Lord's people ‡." In the days of Nehemiah, they "entered

* Anderson's Essays.

† Deut. xxvi.

‡ 2 Kings xi. 17.

tered into a curse, and into an oath, to walk in God's law." These instances clearly shew, that, if God was pleased to receive, Israel were active in making a covenant with him. Though God does not appear to us in the same visible manner, and issue his commandments with an audible voice, his call to enter into covenant with him, which is recorded in his word, is still more sure : and when the church, in obedience to his call, take hold of his covenant, according to the pattern shewed in the scriptures, it is as much the covenant he makes with us, as that of Horeb was the covenant he made with Israel.

But it will not serve the objector's purpose, though it were admitted, that our covenants were only of men's making. For a man's covenant, which has been duly ratified, cannot be annulled by man. "Brethren, I speak after the manner of men ; though it be but a man's covenant, yet, if it be confirmed, no man disannulleth, or addeth thereto *.. It is insinuated that the covenants of our fathers are merely human. It is true, that the Forms which they used were composed by uninspired men ; but, for the making and swearing of them too, they had the command of God. The Form which was used by Nehemiah was not given by inspiration, though it is recorded by the Spirit of God for our imitation ; for we know of no Prophet who flourished at that time, nor of any special revelation, directing them to that duty. They were directed by the Book of the Law, and the expositions of Ezra the scribe : and yet the conduct of Israel in making and swearing that Form is commended by the God of heaven, and recorded to their everlasting honour. But the covenants of our Fathers were not human deeds in the sense of the objection. For no man, who reads them, can deny that the greater part of the matter is religious ; their principal end and design was to promote religion, by binding the swearer to the performance of every duty he owes to God or man ; and they were sworn to God, not by his name, like contracts merely human. But, if they had been no more than human contracts, are they, for this reason, to be set aside at the pleasure of men ? The oath which Zedekiah, king of Judah, swore to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, was unquestionably as much of man's making, as any person can pretend the oath of our covenants can be. Besides, it was extorted from him by the necessity of his circumstances. It subjected him and his people to a foreign yoke, which might seem contrary to the liberty that God had granted to his people. Zedekiah thinking, with the objector, that it was but a man's covenant, and urged by many other plausible pretences, violated his engagements. But the treachery cost him dear. The Avenger of broken covenants

* Gal. iii. 15.

venants declared his hot displeasure, in these terms, which every covenant despiser would do well to remember. "The king of Babylon hath taken of the king's seed, and made a covenant with him, and hath taken an oath of him.—But he rebelled against him, in sending his ambassadors into Egypt, that they might give him horses and much people: shall he prosper? shall he escape that doth such things? or, shall he break the covenant and be delivered? As I live, saith the Lord God, surely in the place where the king dwelleth that made him king, whose oath he despised, and whose covenant he brake, even with him in the midst of Babylon, he shall die. Seeing he despised the oath, by breaking the covenant, when, lo, he had given his hand, and hath done all these things he shall not escape. Therefore, thus saith the Lord God, as I live, surely *mine oath* that he hath despised, and *my covenant* that he hath broken, even it will I recompense upon his own head *." Those human covenants which were sworn only by God, and contained nothing but matters of an indifferent and secular nature, the Most High owns as his covenant, and swears that the perfidious monarch who dared to break it should not escape the deserved punishment; and will God disregard an oath which was sworn to him as the great Party, and contains matters of the highest and most indispensable necessity? Those who wish to sport with such engagements may read their doom in the sentence of a faithless people: "And I will bring a sword upon you, that shall avenge the quarrel of my covenant: and when ye are gathered together within your cities, I will send the pestilence among you; and ye shall be delivered into the hand of the enemy †."

2. The National Covenant is rejected by many, because it carries in its bosom the notion of a national church. It must be acknowledged that our fathers did not consider a national church as inconsistent with the simplicity and spirituality of the New Testament dispensation. But, it is obvious from their proceedings, that, though they believed it necessary to the prosperity of the Church to be enclosed and supported by civil laws, and that her members should exclusively enjoy all ecclesiastical and civil privileges; yet they by no means reckoned these essential. They did not, as some do now, suspend the performance of any one religious duty, upon the countenance and concurrence of the civil power. For they entered into covenant with God, long before they were a national church in any respect. They held more than thirty General Assemblies, before the King attended either in person or by his Commissioner. After the Reformation had obtained all the stability which human laws could give it, and when the countenance of the

* Ezek. xvii. 12, &c.

† Lev. xxvi. 19, 25.

the civil power was eagerly sought, and greatly valued, our fathers often asserted the intrinsic power of the Church to regulate her own affairs; and, on many occasions, acted independent of the Court, and in direct opposition to its measures. Every one, acquainted with the history of our church knows, that, in the year 1596, the Assembly, having taken the state of the nation into consideration, appointed a day of public fasting, and renewed their covenant with the Lord, without any mandate from the King or Parliament. In the year 1638, the Assembly continued its sittings, after the Lord Commissioner had, in his Majesty's name, dissolved it, and discharged its proceedings under pain of treason. But their sentiments will be best understood from the speech of the Moderator on this trying occasion. "All who are present," said the great and good Mr. Henderson, "know how this assembly was indited, and what power we allow to our Sovereign, in matters ecclesiastic: but though we have acknowledged the power of Christian kings for convening assemblies, and their power in them, yet that must not derogate from Christ's right, for he hath given warrant to convocate assemblies, whether magistrates consent or not: therefore, seeing we perceive his Grace my Lord Commissioner to be zealous of his royal master's commands, have not we as good reason to be zealous toward our Lord, and to maintain the liberties and privileges of his kingdom? You all know that the work in hand hath had many difficulties, and yet hitherto the Lord hath helped and born us through them all; therefore it becometh not us to be discouraged at our being deprived of human authority, but rather that ought to be a powerful motive to us to double our courage in answering the end for which we are convened *." This address of the Moderator was followed by several others to the same purpose. Thus, they reckoned the countenance of civil authority useful, but not necessary. They desired it; but by no means depended upon it: and rather than suffer the least encroachment upon the kingdom of their Lord, they boldly encountered the greatest dangers. From this it appears, that the idea of a national church had a very slight hold of their belief and practice. But, allowing to the objection all its force, it can never cancel the obligation of their religious vows. For the church of Christ was still existing in the mixed and incorporated society, and in a state of such activity as to accomplish the purposes of its erection, the conversion and spiritual improvement of the chosen seed. This is granted by the ablest adversary that has appeared against incorporated churches in our times, or perhaps in any other. "We readily premise

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* Stev. Hist. p. 562. Vol. II.

one concession,—That the kingdom of Christ hath always subsisted in national churches, ever since the age of the first incorporation. Meanwhile, by this concession it is only meant, that the church of Christ hath subsisted in these political churches, as a mass of oil remains in water, altogether unmixed and unincorporated with their mixed constitutions. The gospel of Christ hath been successfully preached, and the sacraments, with other institutions, have been edifyingly dispensed, in national churches*.” The same masterly writer adds, with great justice, in the same page ; “ These ordinances are blessed, and made the vehicles of heavenly influence, not as they are dispensed in incorporated churches, in virtue of a political appointment, by civil legislature ; but in consequence of their being viewed by Christians as the institutions of Christ, claiming the attention of their minds, the subjection of their consciences, and the affection of their hearts, on the ground of divine authority alone.” If the institutions of Christ be still valid and beneficial in national churches, as Mr Graham allows and pleads for, and as no intelligent person can refuse ; religious covenants must, for the same reason, be so too, and therefore their obligation is binding.

3. “ In the National Covenant our fathers had respect to acts of Parliament.” This objection is nearly allied to the one we have just considered ; and admits of nearly the same reply. The conduct of our fathers proved, that they did not consider these as essential, more than the presence of the King, or his Commissioner ; but only additional securities. They were compelled to shelter themselves under these evanescent gourds, and to refer to them in their covenants, by the howlings of disloyalty, sedition, and treason, which their enemies raised against them on every side. But for this accustomed rant of tyrants, it is very probable such references had never sullied their solemn vows. Even in their circumstances, it would certainly have been more congenial to the New Testament dispensation to have declined the mention of human laws in their religious Forms ; and to have taken some other method of vindicating the innocence of their intentions and proceedings.

But neither the idea of a national church, nor the reference to human laws, can vitiate or annul these covenants, even though they had been accounted absolutely necessary. To promote the reformation of religion, by every scriptural method, was their grand design ; and is a duty enjoined in the Moral Law. The obligation of this summary duty never can cease, whatever erroneous, improper, or unnecessary articles were adopted, or mistaken views were entertained by the covenanters ;

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* Graham on Civ. Est. p. 81.

for it depends upon the obligation of the Moral Law, which is eternal and unchangeable.

4. Some are dissatisfied with this covenant, "because it contains an oath of allegiance to the government." It is readily granted, that matters purely political ought not to be admitted into a religious covenant. But allegiance is a duty commanded in the word of God. "Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work *." All the duties of the second table, of which this is one, may, with perfect propriety, enter into the matter of a religious covenant; for a relative duty, rightly discharged, is an act of religion performed. When Nehemiah and his people renewed their covenant with the God of their fathers, they entered into a curse, and into an oath, to observe and do all the commandments of the Lord their God. After this general obligation, they proceed to enumerate some of the duties which their peculiar circumstances more loudly called them to observe †. This laudable and authorised example our fathers followed. The allegiance which they swore, does not stand in their Form as a co-ordinate article. They vowed obedience to the civil magistrate, chiefly, for the sake of religion; which is obvious from the words of the oath itself.

"And, because we perceive that the quietness and stability of our religion and kirk doth depend upon the safety and good behaviour of the King's Majesty, as upon a comfortable instrument of God's mercy granted to this country, for the maintenance of his kirk, and ministration of justice amongst us, we protest and promise with our hearts,—that we shall defend his person and authority—in the defence of Christ's evangel," &c. This oath of allegiance is properly limited, and agreeable to the dictates of scripture and right reason; and, therefore, such as any man might lawfully swear. It was necessary, at that time, to vindicate their designs and conduct from the foul aspersions of rebellion against the lawful authority of their Sovereign, with which their enemies were continually loading them.

This example was followed by the Independent Church of Salem, in New-England, in the year 1629, who inserted an oath of allegiance in their church-covenant, in these words; "We do promise to carry ourselves in all lawful obedience to those that are over us in church or commonwealth." This clause in the New-England covenant, approaching nearer to the simplicity of the Apostle's commandment to Titus, is more proper for a religious vow than the long detailed paragraph in the National Covenant. For, though we can see no reasonable objection

* Tit. iii. 1. † Neh. x. 30, 31.

tion to the principle, the latter is more proper for a civil oath than a religious covenant. It would have been exceedingly proper in a separate contract between the King and his subjects; and this, it is humbly conceived, would have answered the same purpose, and been, certainly, liable to fewer objections.

This idea of separate oaths seems to be countenanced in scripture. The civil affairs of Israel were long managed by the special direction of Heaven. To this extraordinary state of things the Mosaic institutions were confined. Therefore, when the people demanded a king, a new civil constitution was framed and ratified: Then Samuel told the people the manner of the kingdom, and wrote it in a book, and laid it up before the Lord*. Israel were a covenanted people, and on many occasions renewed their religious vows; yet, at this important æra, they contented themselves with settling the kingdom, according to its nature, by a civil contract. But, the most decisive instance occurs at the restoration of the monarchy, when Judah shook off the degrading yoke of Athaliah, the usurper of David's throne, and recovered their freedom. And Jehoiada made a covenant between the Lord and the king and the people, that they should be the Lord's people;—between the king also and the people†. Here there are plainly two distinct and separate covenants. In the first, the king and the people made a covenant with the Lord, that they should be the Lord's people. In this covenant the king stood upon the same level with his subjects of every rank. He enters into covenant, but not as a king; for he does not engage to be Jehovah's king, over his chosen Israel, but to be one of the Lord's people. The purpose of the king and the people in entering into covenant is the same; and, therefore, they must have sustained the same character. As professing Christians they entered into covenant together, to be the Lord's people.

But, besides this religious covenant, Jehoiada made a civil contract also, between the king and the people. In this, Joash acts as a king, the first magistrate of Israel; and they as his subjects. He engages to govern by law, for the good of his people; they promise to obey, to bear faithful and true allegiance to him, while he discharged his trust.

5. The celerity with which the National Covenant was subscribed, has exposed the Reformers to the charge of inconsiderate rashness. Religion and liberty, indeed, were dearer to them than life. In the preservation of these great blessings, they felt a lively interest, and were animated by an ardent and invincible zeal. Their public measures

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* 1 Sam. x. 26.

† 2 Kings xi. 17.

were rapid and decisive, as their hearts were warm and energetic. But, it will not follow, that they were, in general, ignorant and rash. The articles of their covenants were the constant theme of discourse, both in public and private life. The people listened to their ministers, they conversed with one another, they perused the writings of the day, with an avidity of which our languid minds can form but a very imperfect idea. By these means, the greater part, were ever in a state of actual preparation for the solemn duty of religious vowing. Daily experience proves, how soon even the mass of the people acquire a competent knowledge of any subject which interests them deeply, and is hourly discussed in their hearing. The accurate and extensive information in civil and religious matters, which enlightened the public mind, in those days, is acknowledged by Bishop Burnet himself*. But, though the ignorance and rashness of many among our covenanting fathers were as great as their enemies pretend, the obligation of their religious covenants remains unimpaired. If the matter of an oath be lawful, the swearer is bound to fulfil his engagements: the sinfulness of the manner cannot annul the obligation. Neither the deceit of the Gibeonites, nor the ignorance and rashness of the rulers of Israel, could excuse the violation of the league into which the congregation had been surpris'd. That inconsiderate engagement was binding upon Israel to the latest generation.

But, whatever blemishes may be found in this Form, we insist that there is a part of it, which is binding on us, and from which no authority nor circumstance whatever, can release these nations. The following articles may be specified.

“We Noblemen, Barons, Gentlemen, Burgesses, Ministers and Commons under subscribing; Do hereby profess, and before God, his angels, and the world, solemnly declare, That with our whole heart we agree, and resolve, all the days of our life, constantly to adhere unto and to defend the foresaid true religion;—To labour by all lawful means to recover the purity and liberty of the gospel;—We promise and swear, by the great name of the Lord our God to continue in the profession and obedience of the foresaid religion: and that we shall defend the same, and resist all these contrary errors and corruptions according to our vocation; and to the uttermost of that power which God hath put into our hands, all the days of our lives.”

“And because we cannot look for a blessing from God upon our proceedings, except with our profession and subscription we join such a life and conversation as becometh Christians who have renewed their covenant with God: We therefore, faithfully promise, for ourselves,

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* Burnet's Hist. of his own Times, Vol. I. p. 225.

our followers, and all others under us, both in public, and in our particular families, and personal carriage, to endeavour to keep ourselves within the bounds of Christian liberty; and to be good examples to others of all godliness, soberness, and righteousness, and of every duty we owe to God and man."

These articles are purely moral, and applicable to the church in all circumstances; and must meet the approbation of every person, who is not a decided enemy to the duty of covenanting. But some insist, that we must take the Form as it stands, and either adopt or reject it wholly. The principle of this strange assertion seems to be, That, if any part of an oath be wrong, the whole is unlawful. But this is not the doctrine of scripture. In the fifth chapter of Matthew, our Lord forbids the use of improper forms of swearing: "But I say unto you, swear not at all: neither by heaven, for it God's throne; nor by the earth, for it is his foot-stool." But, in the twenty-third chapter, he severely rebukes the Pharisees for teaching that such oaths did not bind the conscience. "Wo unto you, ye blind guides, which say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple it is nothing," it is not binding. Therefore, though we swear by a form which is expressly forbidden by God himself; yet, the Saviour declares that man guilty of perjury who fails to perform his oaths. God gave a commandment to the people of Israel utterly to extirpate the nations of Canaan: "I will deliver the inhabitants of the land into thine hand; and thou shalt drive them out before thee: thou shalt make no covenant with them*." Yet, they made peace with the Gibeonites, and promised, upon oath, to spare their lives: and the violation of this oath, after many ages, the God of truth avenged by signal judgments. These instances incontrovertibly prove, that both the form and the matter may be wrong, and yet the obligation of an oath may bind the conscience of the swearer, and descend with unabated force to his latest posterity. When the articles of an oath contradict the precepts of the Moral Law it is of no force; to take such an oath is sinful, and still more sinful to observe it. But when part of them are originally indifferent, simply improper, or duties clearly enjoined in the law of God, it is worse than absurd, to alledge, as some do, that such an oath can ever be annulled. That which is sinful can never vitiate what is eternally holy, just, and good. Therefore, when we grant that there were some things exceptionable both in the matter and manner of the National Covenant; they will by no means dissolve the obligation to perform those articles which are agreeable to scripture, and the dictates of right reason.

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* Exod. xxiii. 31, 32.

S E C T. IV.

OF THE SOLEMN LEAGUE AND COVENANT.

WHILE Scotland, refusing to be fettered by the authority of any mortal, pursued the reformation of religion with invincible ardour, England stopt short in the middle of her career, submitting to the imperious dictates of an earthly head. Elizabeth, though celebrated as the protectress of the reformed religion, ignorant or regardless of the rights of conscience, and despising the unaffected simplicity of the scriptures, rigourously imposed upon her subjects a mode of worship, which was subservient to her worldly grandeur and carnal policy. Her successors, James and Charles I. trode, though with unequal steps, the same path. The seeds of civil and religious liberty, which the Reformation had sown in the public mind, insensibly vegetated and sprung up; and the people grew daily more impatient of arbitrary power, either in religion or civil policy. Persuaded of their right, and conscious of their ability to judge for themselves, they began to bring every doctrine and precept, not excepting the mandates of the Monarch himself, to the test of reason and revelation. Charles, in whose reign this spirit exerted all its energy, had not penetration to discern the full tide of popular opinion setting directly against his lofty and uncontrollable prerogative, or wanted wisdom and greatness of mind to yield, with a good grace, what he could no longer retain. The English Parliament, supported by the great body of the people, were determined upon the total abolition of Prelacy, and the abridgment of the regal authority, which was become incompatible with the liberty of the nation; and Charles was no less determined to resist the slightest change in church or state. Both parties had recourse to arms; and both experienced a variety of success. In the year 1643, the Parliament, seeing their affairs on the verge of ruin, sent Commissioners to solicit the aid of the Scots. On the seventh of August they arrived at Leith, and presented to the Assembly, which was waiting to receive them, a Declaration from both houses of Parliament, expressing their resolution to reform religion in England; their desire that the Assembly would send some of their number to assist their Divines who were now sitting at Westminster; and their extreme need of assistance in their present deplorable condition.

The Scots, exasperated at the insolent treatment which their Commissioners had received from Charles and his Court some time before, and fearing, if the liberties of England were crushed, that their own would speedily follow, gave the kindest reception to the delegates of the English Parliament. But, they would not agree to assist them, unless they consented to a religious union by solemn Covenant. The English Commissioners, urged by the necessity of their affairs, accepted the condition. A draught of the Solemn League and Covenant was presented to the three Committees, from the Parliament of Scotland, from the General Assembly, and from the English Parliament, and agreed to with perfect unanimity. When it was laid before the Assembly, and, after mature deliberation approved of, it is not easy to describe the affecting scene. Tears of pity, of joy, and of fervent piety, flowed from the eyes of the grave, the wise, and the aged members of that venerable body. They were transported at the prospect of the three kingdoms, where civil discord had raged for many years, and where horrid War continued to mark her progress with ruin and with blood, uniting at such a time, and in such a manner, under the Lord Jesus Christ as their common head; and declaring themselves his willing subjects. It was considered by all descriptions of men as a remarkable æra; and by the serious and reflecting, who were not, in those days, the smaller number, it was accounted a day much to be remembered;—a day of the right hand of the MOST HIGH.

The Covenant, having received the sanction of the Assembly and Parliament, was taken, by their appointment, through the whole nation. At London, it was received with the same alacrity. The Divines at Westminster, and the Lords and Commons in Parliament assembled, approved of it as soon as it was laid before them; and, in a few weeks after, solemnly swore and subscribed it with great joy and many tears. Their example was soon followed by the greater part of the kingdom; and about the same time by most of the Irish who embraced the cause of the English Parliament.

The zeal of our fathers for the Covenants, National and Solemn League, was joined with a proportionate concern for the purity of all the other institutions of Christ; for strictness of morals; for genuine liberty, civil and religious; and, in short, for all that is praise-worthy and amiable among mankind. This concern was manifested in the commendable acts of the General Assembly, and of the Parliament; in the due execution of the laws for the suppression of vice, and for the encouragement of virtue and religion; and in the godly and unblemished lives of the most zealous covenanters. Nor is this surprising;—a
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life of this kind is the very end of these solemn engagements; an end the most noble which a reasonable creature can entertain. The truth of this remark derives confirmation even from the reproachful epithets their enemies have commonly thought proper to give them. They have been called Puritans, because they professed to regard the pure word of God as the only rule of their conduct; Fanatics, for the fervency and frequency of their devotions; gloomy and morose, for the severity of their morals; and hypocrites, that while their enemies could find nothing to blame in their outward deportment, they might give full scope to fancy, in supposing them secretly guilty of whatever crimes they pleased*.

The Solemn League and Covenant is one of the most important and celebrated deeds in the history of mankind. Its design embraces whatever is great and precious;—the inestimable blessings of civil and religious freedom. Rejecting arbitrary forms of worship and idle ceremonies, it proposed the word of God as the only rule of faith and manners. It set bounds to the lawless will of one man, and placed the happiness of two mighty nations upon a foundation which should never be moved. It combined into one people those who had waged destructive war against each other from immemorial time; it bade them beat their swords into plough-shares, and their spears into pruning-hooks, and learn war no more. Yet, this covenant, like every thing which strongly contradicts the corruptions of the human heart, is treated with virulent abuse. The objections which are brought to prove it an unlawful deed, are drawn either from the character and ruling principles of our ancestors, or from the articles of the Solemn League and Covenant itself.

S E C T. V.

OBJECTIONS AGAINST THE SOLEMN LEAGUE AND COVENANT, FROM THE CHARACTER AND RULING PRINCIPLES OF OUR ANCESTORS.

TO disprove the lawfulness and obligation of our covenants, the principal actors, in the covenanting of the last century, are charged with being actuated only by carnal and political motives. The English Commissioners, it is said, had no other intention in agreeing to the proposal of a covenant for the reformation of religion, than to flatter a religious

* Anderson's Essays.

religious people whose friendship was then become necessary to the English Parliament.

To this objection we cannot reply with greater propriety than in the words of Mr Anderfon. "However we may judge of the characters of particular persons by the views and motives (so far as we know them) with which they perform any duty, the nature of the duty itself must be discovered by other means. A wicked man will sometimes do an action which is materially good and commendable. Here we judge the matter of the action to be good in opposition to the general character of the man who does it, on account of its conformity to the law of God, the only rule of duty. In like manner we are to examine how far the covenanting of our ancestors was conformable to the word of God; how far it was a public acknowledgment of the Lord as our God; how far it was an engagement to cleave to his truths and ways; how far, in fine, it tended to the glory of God and the good of the church: so far, and no farther, ought we to approve of it; so far should we consider ourselves as having covenanted in the loins of our fathers; so far in the account of God's word, the vow of our fathers is ours, and we are as much bound as they were to pay that vow to the Lord. If our fathers went about public covenanting as a religious duty in a manner agreeable to the word of God, it is absurd, in that case, to suppose that the political views of any that joined in it, would change its whole nature, and render it a merely political transaction. After all, it is not remembered that there is any proof of the charge implied in the objection, to hinder us from considering it as a base aspersion on the memory of our ancestors."

"That the Scots were more ready to assist the English when they saw them engaged in the same covenant of religion and reformation with themselves, is true: but it does not follow the covenanting of the English was "a mere political stratagem." We cannot always judge, with any degree of certainty, of the nature or moral quality of actions from the occasions or consequences of them. Suppose a very wicked person, having occasion for the friendship of a good man, forsakes his vices and engages in a virtuous course of life; from the circumstance alone of his needing at such a time the friendship of the good man, we could not certainly conclude all his reformation to be a mere pretence."

"Why should we blame either the English or the Scots for what they did in this matter? What did the Scots do to deserve our censure? Why, when the English desired their assistance, they put the English in mind of their obligations to the God of heaven, and ad-

54 *Objections against the Solemn League and Covenant.*

vised them to perform a scriptural duty; a duty which was peculiarly calculated to promote zeal and unanimity in the cause wherein they were then engaged. And what did the English Parliament do to deserve our censure? They did what was plainly their duty: they complied with the Christian admonitions of the Scots: a compliance which, far from being blameable, was worthy of great commendation; for a society, as well as an individual, *that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise* *.”

“ We may farther observe, that in subordination to the glory of God and the good of the church, it was by no means unlawful, in framing such a league, to have regard to the political welfare of both nations. The scripture proposes our temporal welfare as an encouragement to religious duties. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth †. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep ‡. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain; and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit §. For he that will love life and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile ||. Our temporal welfare then may well be a subordinate motive to the practice of a religious duty: and our ancestors were by no means blameable for having an eye, in their covenanting, to the preservation of their civil rights and liberties.”

2. It is objected “ that our fathers were of intolerant principles, as appears from the disputes between the Presbyterians and the Independents in the long Parliament, and in the Westminster Assembly.”

The Covenanters certainly did not understand the liberal and rational principle of negative Toleration, which allows every man to worship God according to the dictates of his own conscience, without interruption, or loss of personal rights, while he holds no opinion, and teaches no doctrine, which, in its own nature and necessary tendency, is plainly destructive of common order in society, and while he demeans himself as a good and peaceable citizen ¶. But, they “ counted themselves obliged

* Prov. xii. 15.

† Mat. v. 5.

‡ 1 Cor. xi. 30.

§ Ja. v. 14,—18.

|| 1 Pet. iii. 10.

¶ The Power of the civil Magistrate in matters of religion, according to the principles of the Secession from the beginning, “ Is cut out by, and lies within the compass of natural principles.” Therefore, when he acts in character, it is only as a civil head. Though it is his duty to judge for himself, he has no right to controul the

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obliged in conscience to give the King, ever in church matters, an inspection, a vindication, a sanction, by way of law, a compelling by way of force, churchmen to their duties, a calling of councils, a chief place

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Rulers of the Church, in the discharge of their respective duties. While they are amenable to him in civil matters, in things of a heavenly and spiritual nature, they are accountable to Christ alone. He has a right to review the proceedings of civil courts; but not the spiritual deeds of ecclesiastical. Supernatural religion is not entrusted to his care; though the liberty of professing it, which is a natural and unalienable privilege, certainly is. It belongs to his office to defend the members of the church, in the free and public exercise of the gospel, against all who would interrupt them: and, in this manner, Kings are nursing fathers, and Queens nursing mothers to the Church. But those religions which are contrary to the light of nature, hostile to that obedience to the civil Magistrate which reason demands, and incompatible with the free exercise of the personal right of others to worship God according to their conscience, it is his duty to destroy by all the means in his power. For no person has a right to profess a religion which destroys the rights of others. To him belongs the right of removing every obstruction to the free and uncontrouled exercise of every personal right, whether it relates to civil or religious matters. While he defends the personal rights, the life, liberty, and property of peaceable and good subjects, so far from giving any *positive* encouragement to those teachers whom he believes to be erroneous and corrupt, and to the errors and corruptions which they disseminate, it is his duty to discourage them as much as possible, consistently with the preservation of their natural rights; for it would be absurd and wicked to encourage as a Magistrate, what he cannot in conscience believe and practise as a Christian. While he leaves those who dissent from the church, of which he is a member, in the full enjoyment of their personal rights, he may justly refuse to employ them in places of power and trust, and is entitled to bestow such favours upon those whose sentiments, in every respect, are most congenial with his own. For, as all men cannot be born to rule, no person has a natural claim to be employed in places of power and trust in the civil community. He may not only refuse to employ them, but he has a right, and it is his duty, to cast them out of those employments, when there is just ground to suspect that they would employ the power and emoluments of office to destroy the liberties of their country. It is a duty which he owes to society, to restrain, by positive laws, every open transgression of the Second Table of the Moral Law: and as many violations of the First Table, as Atheism, blasphemy, the denial of a future state of rewards and punishments, perjury, cursing, swearing, and open vexatious breaches of Sabbath, not only disturb the peace, but, many of them, sap the very foundations of civil society, he has a right to enact laws against these crimes, and put them in vigorous execution.

Without assuming a judicial cognizance of revealed Religion, dictating to his subjects in matters of conscience, or infringing the natural liberties of any, he may certainly enact laws, securing to his subjects the free and undisturbed profession of religion: for this is their natural right. And as there are times when plots are laid, and attempts are made, to deprive Christians of a free and peaceable enjoyment of their privileges, it is their duty to apply for protection from the injurious encroachments of their enemies, as it is the Magistrate's to furnish them the means of leading

in them, and a great respect to their voice *.” They believed that it was the duty of the supreme Magistrate, with the assistance of the Church and her censures, by his coercive power, to force and oblige all his subjects to embrace the Reformation, and conform to the true worship and sound doctrine and discipline of the church; and maintained, that, “though it be the sinful practice of the church of Rome to force men and women to be of their religion; which is superstitious and idolatrous; yet it is not so to others, who have the true religion among them †. Upon these principles they too frequently acted. For, in the year 1560 the Scottish Parliament passed an

a quiet and peaceable life, in all godliness and honesty. All this is competent to the civil Powers, and incumbent upon them as the guardians of the natural rights belonging to themselves and others, without overstepping the bounds of their civil office, encroaching upon the peculiar business of the church, or infringing the liberty of any man's conscience. Laws of this kind may, with perfect propriety, be enforced with civil pains and punishments, as a transgression of them would be a palpable breach of the peace. Nor can the due execution of such penalties offer any injury to liberty of conscience; for no man can pretend conscience for injuring his neighbour. The civil Magistrate may also grant the church as a society, in common with other societies, the privilege of being viewed and acknowledged in law as an individual. And, in fine, the Magistrate, as every other man, is bound to exercise his office in subordination to the glory of God, and the interests of religion. As the Rulers of the Church have no right to interfere in civil affairs, but only as they respect conscience; Magistrates have no right to interpose in spiritual matters, but as they respect the peace and safety of the commonwealth.

But he is to be considered as a Christian as well as a Magistrate. The Christian who holds the reins of Government in the civil community, has a right, as well as the other members of the Church, to require the meeting of Synods, to be present at them, and exert his utmost care, that whatsoever is transacted in them, be according to the mind of God, and may advise with them as often as he finds it necessary. It is his duty to exhibit, in his own person and family, an example of sobriety, righteousness, and godliness, bright as the civil station he holds is conspicuous. Instead of honouring, with his familiarity or friendship, the avowed adversaries of religion; his delights should be placed with the tried friends of Truth and Reformation. To the Rulers of the Church he ought to yield the same meek and cheerful submission in religious matters, as he expects and requires from them in civil affairs; and to excite and animate her members to be steadfast and immovable in the faith of Christ. All this power is fully consistent with liberty of conscience. It leaves the Church, of which the Magistrate is a member, in full possession of all ecclesiastical jurisdiction; and Dissenters, of all their natural rights. See more largely Morison and Graham.

* Baillie's Lett. Vol. I. p. 115.

† D. Dickson's Truth's Vict. And this he gives as the very sense of those passages in the Confession of Faith, which treat of the Magistrate's power in matters of religion: and he was surely better qualified to give the real meaning of the compilers than any in our times.

an act "for punishment of the sayers and hearers of mafs, with imprisonment for the first transgression, banishment for the second, and death for the third. It would seem that the pains of this last named transgression, have been thought somewhat too severe, for though there have been many instances of persons punished for idolatry, with imprisonment, and banishment, we know of none who were put to death on that account*." It was proposed to punish those who preached, wrote, or published, against the Confession of Faith, for the third offence, with the loss of all their goods, and perpetual imprisonment. Of this intolerance Mr Samuel Rutherford, one of the greatest and best men of his time, feelingly complains. "Our work in public," says that distinguished covenanter, "was too much in sequestration of estates, in fining and imprisoning, more than in a compassionate mournfulness of spirit toward those whom we saw oppose the work of God." Such unrighteous laws and proceedings we will by no means defend.

But why should intolerance be charged upon the Covenanters, as if it were their peculiar crime? Were the clamours of prejudice stilled, and the voice of reason and history allowed to be heard, our fathers will be found more indulgent to Dissenters, and more favourable to genuine liberty of conscience, than any of the great religious societies which disputed with them the palm of victory. While a deluge of innocent blood was shed by the churches of England and of Rome, not a single person lost his life by the sword of the Covenanters, for his religious profession. Even the Independents themselves, the great advocates of unbounded liberty, and the admiration of the modern adversaries to the covenanted reformation, were as great enemies to the rights of conscience, and guilty of as unjustifiable severities as any class of men. The leaders of that religious sect, in the Assembly at Westminster, held the opinion, that the excommunicated, if they continued impenitent, were to be delivered into the hands of the civil Magistrate to be punished according to their desert. This was not a speculative opinion, but a principle upon which they acted. At the very time they were pleading for unbounded liberty at home, they were treating the Presbyterians in New-England with the utmost rigour. Not a single dissenter was permitted to live there. Whoever presumed to worship God, in separate congregations, let their life and doctrine be ever so pure, were delivered up to the civil Magistrate to be punished with banishment, perpetual slavery, or death itself†. At home, before one law passed in favour of Presbytery, before the question of Toleration

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* Stev. Hist. Vol. I. p. 107.

† Baillie's Lett. Vol. I. p. 439. Vol. II. p. 4, 17, 18.

was debated either in the Assembly or Parliament, and consequently, before they could know what degree of liberty was to be granted to those who could not join with the Presbyterian church, they had actually formed and were endeavouring, by various methods, to execute the plan of dissolving the union of the three nations, of abolishing the house of Lords, of dividing the house of Commons, of filling the city and the provinces with intestine wars, and of setting up themselves and Cromwell their idol, upon the ruins of the laws and liberties of their country *. The religious sentiments of many Independents were as wild as their political principles were despotic and cruel. Mr Williams and his followers maintained, " That there is no church, no sacraments, no pastors, no church-officers nor ordinances in the world, nor have been since a few years after the Apostles." And, because the Presbyterians refused to grant a toleration, by act of Parliament, to the avowed enemies of their country, who were already conspiring to wreath the yoke of unqualified despotism about the neck of their fellow-citizens, they are represented by many as the basest of men.

As the Toleration which the Independents demanded was inconsistent with the safety of civil and religious liberty, so it was both wicked and absurd. A positive Toleration, is no less contrary than persecution itself, to the liberal principle on which we plead for a negative toleration, the only one which is agreeable to right reason. The principle is this, That though the Magistrate is bound to consult, in all his proceedings, the glory of God and the interests of religion; yet, it does not belong to his office to judge in matters of revealed religion, nor to interfere with the right of private judgment, which is natural, common, unalienable, and sacred. But the positive Toleration of the Independents, supposes that the Magistrate, having established one Religion as the true, is to sit in judgment on other religions, and having pronounced them to be false and wrong, is, however, to tolerate, or rather to give them countenance, under the very consideration of their being false and wrong religions.

While they were employing the sword of the civil Magistrate, to punish Dissenters from their churches, in New-England, finding him in Britain less complying, they strenuously denied that he had any right to restrain the religious doctrines, profession, and life of any person, however erroneous and vile, if he did not disturb the public peace by seditious or wicked practices. According to this sentiment, the doctrines, profession, and life of the Atheist, of the Papist, and some others, which, in their very nature and necessary tendency, are destructive of common

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* Baillie's Lett. Vol. II. p. 66, 76, 77.

order in society, must not only be endured, contrary to the great law of self-defence, but be favoured with the countenance and encouragement of the civil Magistrate. But with this extravagant demand the Independents were not satisfied; they insisted that Dissenters of every description, be put upon the same footing with the other members of society, whose dearest rights and privileges, many of them were straining every nerve to destroy. Had the Covenanters yielded to these absurd and deceitful claims, they would have acted wickedly before God, in giving positive countenance to what they believed was morally wrong; they would have acted the part of children and fools to themselves and their posterity, in surrendering their civil and religious rights into the hands of their open and implacable foes. What had they to expect from Papists, after the bitter experience of more than a hundred years, and the recent instance of the Irish massacre, one of the most tragical scenes those enemies of God and man had ever exhibited? What had they to expect from Episcopalians who had joined the Papists in arms against their country, and were laying waste their possessions with fire and sword; were murdering their relations, ravishing their wives, and committing every excess*. Who, or where is he that will entrust his bloody and irreconcilable enemy, with all that he reckons dear in this world? Where is the man that does not try to disarm the robber, and put it out of his power to do farther injury?

While we do not plead that our fathers were never actuated by narrow and intolerant principles, never betrayed into acts of undue severity, this we will assert, that making reasonable allowance for their long and accumulated distresses, their fearful dangers, their severe losses, their immeasurable provocations†, and for the unavoidable infirmities of human nature, the diligent and candid inquirer will find them better acquainted with the rights of conscience, and greater enemies to persecution, than any of their opponents. But though their principles and conduct had been as violent and sanguinary as their enemies represent, this circumstance could by no means invalidate the obligation of their solemn vows to maintain and promote the religion of Christ.

3. The enemies of the Solemn League and Covenant represent the Reformers "as a set of wild enthusiasts;" which they endeavour to prove from the fervour and length of their devotional exercises, from the high spiritual attainments to which they laid claim, and from their indexible perseverance in the cause of reformation.

That

* Baillie's Lett. Vol. II. p. 115. † Ibid. p. 162.

That there might be enthusiasts among the Covenanters is granted; and that the coolest and the best among them, might, at times, be under the partial influence of an enthusiastic spirit, none who attend to the infirmities of human nature, will deny. But where is the proof, that the great body, or any part of the nation in those days were habitual enthusiasts? Fervent devotions are, surely, no indication of enthusiasm; for, then, a greater enthusiast than David, the sweet singer of Israel, never existed. Where shall we find more fervent aspirations of soul than his? And yet, they have obtained the unequivocal seal of Heaven's approbation, and are recorded in the Book of Psalms for our learning, by the direction of the Spirit. Neither is the length of religious exercises any infallible mark of enthusiasm; for our Lord spent his days in preaching to the people, and many of his nights in prayer to his Father. Our fathers laid claim to high religious attainments, but they were agreeable to scripture and the dictates of right reason. Their fellowship was with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ. Their attainments were great; but not greater than those of the Prophets, Apostles, and holy men, whose intercourse with God is described, with approbation, in the unerring oracles of Heaven. The conduct of our fathers betrayed no symptom of an enthusiastic spirit. They believed that they contended for the cause of God and truth, and that they were favoured with his approbation and support. But this faith was not enthusiastic; for, instead of relaxing their diligence, or driving them into fanciful extremes, it stirred up persons of all ranks to unexampled purity of life, and activity in the service of God, according to the scriptures. These very things, indeed, have fixed the stigma of enthusiasm upon them; and no regard to scripture, nor the conduct of inspired or holy men will remove it, in the opinion of their adversaries. Let us try them, then, by a rule to which there can be no objection. It will be granted by all, that persons may be frantic enthusiasts in one cause, and in every other sober and reasonable. But if the Covenanters were enthusiasts, they were enthusiasts for civil as well as for religious liberty. If uncommon fervour of mind, if diligent application, if inflexible perseverance, and high pretensions be sufficient to prove them enthusiasts in religion, they must be equally sufficient to prove them enthusiasts in the cause of freedom. It is well known that religion and liberty were inseparably conjoined through the whole of their arduous struggle. But their contendings for civil liberty will be found perfectly agreeable to reason. They prepared the means of defence with foresight, intelligence, and vigour. Every precaution was taken to consolidate their union; large sums of money were raised; arms

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were provided in abundance; troops were levied and carefully trained to the use of arms; officers of tried valour and great experience were chosen to lead their armies; and the chief command was given to General Leslie, a man of consummate abilities in the art of war. So wise, firm, and just, were the measures of these hair-brained enthusiasts, that Charles was completely foiled, and obliged to grant them all their demands. Was this the conduct of wild enthusiasts? Are not these the means which the wise and brave, in all ages, have employed for their defence. What other could their enemies rationally propose:—and yet, these are the men who must be branded with the odious epithet of gloomy and frantic enthusiasts!

4. Their proceedings have been represented as “unconstitutional, illegal, and rebellious.”

This is the common cant of Tyrants. The Samaritans insisted that the covenanters in the days of Nehemiah, were rebels against the king of Persia. Nero and Trajan, Roman emperors, however opposite in character, agreed in finding the covenanting Christians enemies to the state. Under the same hackneyed pretence, the bloody house of Savoy, with unparalleled barbarity, rooted out the Evangelical churches in the valleys of Piedmont. This weapon of Antichrist, the friends of passive obedience and non-resistance, have turned against our ancestors and their religious covenants. But to this charge of ignorance and malice, the royal cares of Charles I. have provided us with a triumphant reply. In the year 1638, his Majesty gave orders to his Council to consult the most *eminent* and *least suspected* of the Scots lawyers concerning the legality of the Covenanters' proceedings, in assembling without his authority, protesting against the proclamation of his royal will and pleasure, and entering into covenant without his command and concurrence. Sir Thomas Hope, the King's Advocate, with — Nicolson and Sir Lewis Stewart of Blackhall, being accordingly consulted, gave their opinion, “That the most part of the Covenanters' proceedings were warranted by law: and that, though in some things they seemed to have exceeded, yet there was no express law against them*.”

Their proceedings were as loyal, as they were constitutional, legal, and dutiful. In their Covenants, they renounced, in the most solemn manner, all disloyal intentions, and all desire to attempt the least diminution of the King's just and lawful authority. To defend the King's person and maintain his rights, was one of the reasons that they entered into their oath and covenant. In the forms which they used on these occasions, they expressed their detestation of all rebellion; they swore

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* Stev. Hist.

to be examples of godliness, righteousness, and of *every duty which they owed to God or man*. They engaged to maintain religion according to the tenor of the larger confession, which was approved by all the Scottish Parliaments since the Reformation. The 29th article of that confession relates to the magistrate, and affirms, "that all who would take away, or trouble the state of our civil policy, now established, to be no less than enemies of mankind, and fighters against the manifest word of God; that all who are in authority are to be loved, honoured, feared, and held in the highest estimation, because they are God's vicegerents; God sits in their thrones; and to Princes God himself has given the sword; and that all who resist authority, resist the authority of God, and so cannot be innocent before God." By this covenant they considered themselves bound to maintain their King in all cases which scripture, reason, and the laws and customs of the kingdom required*. Their obligation to mutual defence in promoting religion and liberty, against all persons whatsoever, by no means convicts them of disloyalty; for this article is perfectly agreeable to the Scottish laws. The forty-seventh act of the third Parliament of James VI. ordains, That all faithful subjects promise to maintain to the uttermost of their power, all the preachers and professors of the gospel, "against all gainstanders whatsoever." This mutual defence, commanded in our standing laws, is more absolute than the defence expressed in our covenants; for in the latter, to prevent mistakes, two limitations are inserted; one of which is, that the protection promised to the professors of the gospel is not only in maintaining the true religion, but also his Majesty's just and legal authority†.

From these sentiments they never departed. While like men, and like Christians, they insisted upon full security for their civil and religious rights, they defended the unhappy Charles, against Cromwell and the Independents, to the utmost of their power. All their thoughts and endeavours were directed to peace with the Court; and they neglected no opportunity of obtaining it, and left no proper means untried. After the King had fled to the Scots army and was fully in their power, they still treated him with the affection and respect which were due to his rank. The General Assembly replied to his letter in the dignified but cordial language of genuine loyalty. The Scottish nobles, on their knees, entreated his assent to the propositions for peace, presented by the English Parliament. They were prepared, upon his giving them this necessary and reasonable satisfaction, to have exposed their lives, and all that was dear to them in this world, for the preservation

* Stev. Hist. Vol. II. p. 289.

† Ibid. p. 291.

tion of his person, honour, and happiness, against all opposition. When he determined to leave them, and put himself into the hands of the English, the Scottish Parliament again sent Commissioners, praying him, with all earnestness and humility, to grant them peace and security, and promising, on that condition, to support his throne to the last extremity. Disappointed in their just demands, they consented to his desire and the vote of the English Parliament, for his going to London, on the express condition that there should "be no harm, prejudice, injury, or violence, done to his person, authority, and family." After many other testimonies of loyalty from the General Assembly, from their Commission, and from the Parliament of Scotland, both church and state, still panting for a reconciliation with the King, and shocked at the violent and illegal conduct of the Independents, in bringing him to the Tower, and appointing him to be tried for his life, instructed their Commissioners to use their utmost endeavours to save him. In the mean time, the whole body of the English Presbyterians who remained faithful to their covenant, ministers, and people, appeared in his favour, by a petition and representation to the Junto of the English Parliament, and then by a bold remonstrance to his Judges. The Scots Commissioners, according to their instructions, did, on the 6th of January 1649, in name of the kingdom of Scotland, present an energetic remonstrance to the Junto against their proceedings. Finding their remonstrance ineffectual, they sent to the Speaker of the house of Commons, in the name of the people of Scotland, their solemn protest against the King's prosecution. Not content with this, they wrote to General Fairfax, in hopes that he would interpose to save his Sovereign from the impending stroke. When the Parliament of Scotland received the certain intelligence of his execution, they proclaimed his son Charles II. and sent a copy of their Act and Proclamation to their Commissioners at London, with a remonstrance to the Junto against the King's death. This statement demonstrates the loyalty, integrity, and uprightness of the Scottish and English covenanters: and when their inviolable attachment is contrasted with the insolent despotism, the puerile frowardness, and stupid infatuation of Charles, it will not be easy to find a parallel either in ancient or modern times. In fine, to those who are still disposed to reproach them with rebellion, we reply, that they were just such rebels as placed William III. and afterwards the house of Hanover on the throne of these kingdoms: and if they were rebellious and disloyal, the present family, whom this nation chose to fill the vacant throne, must be usurpers, and obedience to them, continued rebellion.

5. Our Covenants were enjoined "under civil penalties." It is granted, that the Covenants, in a religious view, could not be enforced by civil pains; for the weapons of the Church's warfare are not carnal, but spiritual. But there are some duties in these obligations, as subjection to magistrates, and mutual support in the free and peaceable enjoyment of their rights, which may be justly enforced in that manner. The invasion of these privileges is a palpable breach of the peace; and when gentle methods fail, every man will allow, that the public tranquillity must be maintained by force. The perilous circumstances in which our fathers were placed, imperiously required them to support one another, in defending their just rights against the violent and undisguised attacks of their enemies. Their All was at stake; the liberty and property of themselves and their children; and it was their duty, by their union, their vigilance, and activity, to save them or perish. To enforce this mutual defence, under all civil pains, was no imposition upon conscience, as some pretend; for there was no difference of opinion among the various denominations of Protestants, concerning the lawfulness of every article in these covenants. The enemies of civil and religious liberty disapproved of them, only because they opposed their arbitrary and tyrannical designs. As a proof of this, the malignant party were, every one, ready to swear the National Covenant; nay, even Charles I. positively required his subjects to swear it. And he objected to the Bond, in which our ancestors renewed that covenant, because it was an application of it, to the evils which he was then attempting to force upon church and state. The only objection which the enemies of civil and religious liberty had against the Covenants was, that they would not allow them to impose upon their fellow-subjects;—and where was the harm in obliging them, under all civil pains, to swear that they would abstain from hurting their neighbour? Is it an imposition upon any man's conscience to hinder him from imposing upon the consciences of others?

The Act, June 11. 1640, enjoining the Covenants, under all civil pains, seems to have been far more limited in its operation, agreeable to reason, and the established practice of free states, than many are willing to believe. Those who refused to take the Covenant were never punished, by this Act, with more than exclusion from places of power and trust. And this exclusion was, perhaps, the whole design of the Act. That the phrase, "all civil pains," means only to prevent the recusants from imposing upon others, is evident from the Act itself; for when it comes to require the covenant to be sworn, particularly by all the Members of Parliament, the formidable expression, "all civil pains,"

pains," sinks into the recusants having "no place nor voice in Parliament." Not a word of fines, confiscations, or imprisonments. But, can it be shown, or is it to be supposed, that those venerable patriots had one rule for Members of Parliament, and another for the rest of the nation? It seems, then, by all civil pains, they meant only to exclude those who refused, from places of power and trust.

But this exclusion is considered as an act teeming with "hypocrisy, rebellion, and persecution." For, say the Covenanters, "We required peremptorily to stand to our former principles and covenant, to have religion settled first, and the King not restored, until he had given security by his oath, to consent to an act of Parliament for enjoining the Covenant in all his dominions, and settling religion according to the Covenant." And again, "We were peremptory to have none in our army that would not take the Covenant."

And, can any reasonable man blame them for keeping the sword out of the hands of those men who were well known to be eagerly waiting for the opportunity of turning it against them? Can they be blamed for taking effectual measures for securing their dearest rights, for the sake of which they had suffered so much, and struggled so long? Must they expose themselves to certain ruin, to prevent the voluntary wickedness of their adversaries, and to gratify them with the enjoyment of power which they had prostituted to the purposes of civil and religious tyranny, times without number? Would the modern enemies of Covenanters have done this? "But they would not permit the King to occupy the throne of his fathers unless he gave security;"—security for what? For the free and peaceable enjoyment of their civil and religious liberty, which he had spent his whole life and his utmost exertions, and brought the nation to the verge of ruin, to undermine and destroy. And does not every free people act in the same manner? In this country, is there a single person admitted to any place of power and trust, without giving that security to the nation which the law requires? Has not every one of the present family, at his coronation, sworn to preserve the liberties of his subjects; and could he be admitted to the throne of his ancestors but upon that condition?

"But not a soldier was to be admitted to serve in the army without taking the Covenant." And is there a soldier in the British armies at this day, who has not been obliged to take the oaths to be faithful to his king and country? Let that free nation be named which does not require conditions of her Rulers, and of those who may employ the power, with which they are intrusted, to the public hurt? Every nation that desires to preserve its liberty, must, and will act as they did,
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if it be not altogether infatuated. The history of that period clearly demonstrates the indispensable necessity of such precautions. When Charles II. ascended the throne, the malignants, or the enemies of liberty, gathered about him, complaining of the hardships they had endured by their exclusion, and boasting of their willingness and ability to serve him. The young King, pleased with their temper and principles, embraced their cause, and, without delay, took measures for their re-admission to places of power and trust. The critical situation of affairs furnished an argument for employing them in the army. The Commission of the Church, which Charles found it necessary to consult, having consented to wave the usual securities, the army was presently filled with them. The Court having gained this important point, proposed to the Commission, "Whether or not it be unlawful,—to admit such to be members of the Committee of Estates who were now debarred from the public trust; they being such as have satisfied the kirk for the offence for which they were excluded, and are since admitted to enter into covenant with us *." Then they pressed the Commission to declare, "If it be sinful to repeal the ACT OF CLASSES?" To this repeal also, the Commission yielded; upon which, says Mr Woodrow, "The Parliament rescinded the Act of Classes, in all its articles; by which, great numbers, formerly excluded, were brought into Parliament, and nominate as members of the Committee of Estates, and made capable of places of trust. And, in a little time, the malignant party, at least the bulk of them, were admitted to the chief places of trust, and got the management of all into their hand." Thus, the enemies of liberty, who, from the year 1638, had been unweariedly plotting its ruin, accomplished their purpose. The beautiful fabric of national freedom, the fruit of so many prayers, of so many cares, of so much blood and treasure, was assailed from every side, and levelled with the ground.

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* A satisfying of the kirk, or a taking of the Covenant, could be no security to church or state; while it was visible they were willing to comply with any such measures; provided, they could hereby gain their own political ends,—and for these ends only. (Bishop Burnet in his history, calls it a "mock penitence," which "was indeed a matter of great scandal.") It was indeed visible, that any fair conditions proposed by the Commission, in their answer to the first question, were to be made no proper account of, or further than to catch at the general conclusion;—and that any fair conditions proposed in this second question, were only designed as a specious pretence; all which the event soon put beyond all doubt. Morison.

This question clearly proves that the act enjoining the Covenant, under all civil pains, meant to debar the refuser from the public trust and no more—They who refused were merely excluded; but their titles and estates, if they did not appear in arms against their country, remained untouched.

Civil and religious tyranny succeeded; and a bloody persecution of twenty-eight years duration, closed the scene. This was the goodly recompence of Scotland's unparalleled fidelity to the First and Second Charles, and of her fatal indulgence to the enemies of her prosperity. This is the work of the very men in whose favour such an outcry is raised by some pretended friends of the rights of man. "Simeon and Levi are brethren; instruments of cruelty are in their habitations. O my soul, come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly mine honour be not thou united! For in their anger they slew a man, and in their self-will they digged down a wall. Curfed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel: I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel."

In excluding such men, and in guarding against such calamities, our ancestors did nothing but their duty. Every nation is bound in duty to themselves and their children, to require security of their magistrates, supreme and subordinate, for the preservation of their rights. And when a people are favoured with the true religion, the most precious of all blessings, it is their duty to guard the right of professing it freely and peaceably, by every possible security. Will any wise man appoint his avowed enemy to superintend his affairs? That the Presbyterians were the majority, and consequently had a right to exercise all national acts, appears from incontrovertible authority. The act of Parliament establishing Presbytery in Scotland, in the year 1689, asserts it, in these terms; "Whereas the Estates of this kingdom, in their claim of rights, declared, that Prelacy, and the superiority of any office in the church above Presbyters, is, and hath been a great and insupportable grievance to this nation, and contrary to the inclinations of the generality of the people, ever since the Reformation." Mr Baillie, in one of his letters from London, dated October 1645, asserts, that the body of the English nation were decidedly in favour of Presbytery. His words are—"The body of the Parliament, City, and Country, are for the Presbytery, and love us." The Sectaries, then, could not reasonably complain, as some of their friends would have them, that the Presbyterians, by securing to themselves the free and undisturbed exercise of their rights, civil and religious, and excluding from places of power and trust, those who wanted to rob them of both, "were disturbers of civil society." Upon these principles the kingdom of Scotland provided that the person who ruled over them, should be of the same religion with themselves; and excluded from any share in the management of public affairs, all who were disaffected to the Reformation, and friends to the arbitrary measures of the Court. Nor is the nature of this

this right of exclusion, nor the propriety and necessity of exercising it, affected by the unbecoming rigour which sullied the proceedings of both Church and State in the last years of the covenanting period.

In the Act enjoining the Covenants under all civil pains, our ancestors did nothing but what every other nation does, when it is in their power. There is not a people on earth, but wish to have magistrates of their own religious persuasion; none, but would wish to have magistrates disposed and obliged to protect and defend their civil rights and privileges; and who would not endeavour to deprive those who avowed themselves their enemies, determined to reduce them to slavery and wretchedness, of the power and capacity of accomplishing their designs? Though a man of no religion might manage the civil affairs of a nation with much success, he is but ill qualified for protecting men in the exercise of their religious rights: and though it is the duty of religious people to submit to the just and legal authority of such rulers, yet it is by no means their duty to choose them: much less is it proper to intrust the declared and bitter enemies of religion and liberty, with the protection of those precious privileges. No man can be justly deprived of his natural rights for non-conformity to the religion of his country. If he violate the personal rights of others, civil or religious, let him suffer according to the demerit of his crime; but it is an act of folly and injustice to compel him to embrace a religious profession, on pain of losing his privileges as a good and peaceable subject of the state. Property is not founded in grace; therefore, a man cannot be justly deprived of it for the want of this religious blessing. But a man may certainly be refused a place of power and trust, till he has given proper evidence of his fitness for the charge. The reason is, as a good subject, he is entitled to the protection of his natural privileges; to a place in the government he has no claim, but at the discretion of the society to which he belongs.—No man was ever born to rule.—Thus, it is true, the bitter and obstinate enemies of liberty, were refused places of power and trust, the nation judged them unfit to defend those privileges, which, it was known, they wanted to destroy. But, by this exclusion, no injury was done them; no infringement made upon their civil privileges, life, liberty, and property*.

From these things, we think it is undeniable, that our fathers did no injustice, when they enjoined the Solemn League under all civil pains, as it contained the civil duties of allegiance and mutual support, which are lawful in their nature, and at that time indispensibly necessary. The Church, in this business, acted according to her constitution. She
enjoined

* Morison's Serm. on Covenanting.

enjoined the swearing of the Solemn League, under all ecclesiastical censures, leaving it to the State to secure the liberties of the subject by civil pains. To this it will be replied, that the Church addressed the civil powers to ratify and enjoin the Covenants under all civil pains, acting like the man of sin who delivers the irreclaimable heretic to the punishment of the secular arm. We answer, if the Church, in addressing the State to ratify the Covenants under all civil pains, meant no more than the exclusion of those men from places of power and trust, who were declared enemies to the unalienable rights of conscience, they did nothing but their duty. Every body of men have a right to petition the government of their country for those measures which are necessary to preserve their lawful privileges. But if they intended to deprive peaceable subjects of their personal rights, they offered an insult to the benign spirit of the gospel, and the dictates of right reason.

While a religious covenant is on no account whatever to be enforced by civil pains, the articles of allegiance and mutual support, in the Solemn League, viewed as necessary for the preservation of civil and religious liberty, may be enjoined, in this manner, with perfect justice. For no man will deny the lawfulness of self-defence. But, the writer cannot help being of opinion, that it is improper to admit articles into a religious covenant, however lawful and necessary, which require to be enforced under all civil pains. It must be confessed, that it is difficult, properly to understand the measures of others, unless when all circumstances are fairly and cautiously weighed. The lapse of time increases this difficulty every moment. At the end of a hundred and fifty years, and amid the violent clamour of contending parties, it is very difficult indeed, to form a determinate judgment. It certainly was not easy to separate those articles which might not, from those which might be enjoined under all civil pains. Their religion was ready to be swallowed up in the gulph of tyranny. The free and peaceable profession of the truth was infringed or denied. This naturally led them to secure their civil liberty for the sake of their religion. But, admitting all the arguments which various writers have advanced upon the singular and trying circumstances of our ancestors, it was certainly as easy for them, as men and citizens, to enter into a civil league for the defence of their natural rights, and, as members of the church, to renew their covenant with God, by a separate religious bond, as to frame and swear a covenant which is compounded of both. Besides, separate bonds would have prevented the plea which has cast so great an odium on their proceedings, that they enforced a religious covenant with civil pains and punishments. A civil and a religious bond would have

answered the same purpose; and the former might have been enjoined under all civil pains, and the latter with ecclesiastical censures, according to their different natures. In combining them into one, they seem to have acted improperly; but by no means in contradiction to the duty which we owe to our neighbour, according to the Moral Law. But a defect of this nature cannot invalidate the obligation of an oath, which, in other respects, is lawful and proper. Though civil pains were altogether improper, they are only an external circumstance, which is not sufficient to take away the validity of a divine ordinance.

Though some might be compelled by the fear of punishment, which was too much employed, to embrace the covenanted cause, they were, nevertheless, bound to fulfil their vows. The congregation of Israel were forced to submit to the league which the princes had made with Gibeon; yet, God severely punished them for breaking it. It is a Protestant principle, that compulsory measures cannot excuse the covenant-breaker. It is absurd to alledge, that, because these covenants were enjoined with civil penalties, the Covenanters could not be voluntary in swearing them; for, if this consequence were admitted, there could be no voluntary obedience to any law, human or divine. Many accounts of particular persons, parishes, and large assemblies, willingly and cheerfully entering into covenant with God, have reached our times. An ardent zeal for religion was the ruling character of those days. The men of that generation were overawed by the fear of God, and constrained by the love of Christ; principles which shone with uncommon lustre in their proceedings. Candour and reason require us to believe, that the arguments of scripture which the ministers of the gospel used, made a much deeper impression upon minds of this temper, and communicated a stronger impulse to their conduct, than any fear of threatened confiscation.

6. It is contended "that this oath could not be sworn in truth, righteousness, and judgment, because it was taken on the Sabbath, immediately after that on which it was read and explained to the people." But the orders of the Commission, according to Stevenson, were, not to cause all persons indiscriminately, but all of UNDERSTANDING, men and women, swear it on the Sabbath following; which entirely destroys this formidable objection. The same charge of ignorance and rashness is considered under the National Covenant.

S E C T. VI.

OBJECTIONS AGAINST THE ARTICLES OF THE SOLEMN LEAGUE CONSIDERED.

1. IT has been objected "that the Solemn League and Covenant was formally and ultimately a state oath." This allegation is partly true. But it is certainly not true that this covenant is altogether a deed of state policy. The General Assembly, in receiving and treating with the English Commissioners, had in view, as their principal object, the preservation of religion at home, and the reformation of it in England and Ireland. "Yet, truly," says Baillie, "we must take God to witness, "in the midst of the flames of his wrath, that the public intentions of the "godly in the land, have been, and are, for the glory of his name, for "the advancement of piety, truth, and righteousness, without the hurt "of any flesh, except so far as our necessary defence does compel." For these noble purposes, they insisted on a religious union with that nation by solemn covenant. Of this league, the cause of God and truth is obviously the prominent feature. It forms the sole subject of the first and second articles. In the fourth, it is the very first thing which the Covenanters engage to secure. In the sixth and last, its preservation is a principal reason for that mutual defence to which they engage. The conclusion is too remarkable and apposite to be omitted: "And because these kingdoms are guilty of many sins and provocations against God, and his Son Jesus Christ, as is too manifest by our present distresses and dangers, the fruits thereof; we profess and declare before God and the world, our unfeigned desire to be humbled for our own sins, and for the sins of these kingdoms; especially, that we have not as we ought, valued the inestimable benefit of the gospel, that we have not laboured for the purity and power thereof, and that we have not endeavoured to receive Christ in our hearts, nor to walk worthy of him in our lives; which are the causes of other sins and transgressions so much abounding amongst us; and our true and unfeigned purpose, desire, and endeavour for ourselves, and all others under our power and charge, both in public and private, in all duties we owe to God and man, to amend our lives, and each one to go before another in the example of a real reformation; that the Lord may turn away his wrath and heavy indignation, and establish these churches and kingdoms in truth and peace. And this covenant we make in the presence of ALMIGHTY GOD, the searcher of all hearts, with a true intention to

perform the same, as we shall answer at that day when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed: most humbly beseeching the Lord to strengthen us, by his Holy Spirit, for this end, and to bless our desires and proceedings with such success, as may be deliverance and safety to his people, and encouragement to other Christian churches, groaning under, or in danger of the yoke of Antichristian tyranny, to join in the same, or like association and covenant; to the glory of God, the enlargement of the kingdom of Jesus Christ, and the peace and tranquillity of Christian kingdoms and commonwealths."

That covenant, the matter of which is for the most part religious; the great objects, the glory of God, the success of the gospel, and the reformation of manners, is, beyond all reasonable doubt, a religious covenant. And as such, it was considered by the Church; for by their orders it was administered by ministers, in the churches, and on the Lord's day. The Church could do nothing more to make it a religious deed: and if their authority, in this business, was seconded, or even surmounted, by the authority of the State, it existed, notwithstanding, and discovered no contemptible energy.

But it is contended that the Covenants were state oaths, "because the very titles our fathers took to themselves, respect men as members of the State:"—"We Noblemen, Barons, Knights, Gentlemen, Burgeesses, Ministers of the gospel, and Commons of all sorts*." The caviller is often as much to be pitied as the object of his miserable censure. How one of these titles, *Ministers of the gospel*, respects men as members of the State, the letter-writer is desired to shew. Every candid person will allow that these titles were used to comprehend all classes of men. If our fathers had dreamed that the use of these harmless designations would annihilate all that is religious in their covenants, and transform them at once into state oaths, they would certainly have rejected them with abhorrence. But this important discovery was reserved for the end of the eighteenth century. The people of Israel were as ignorant as our ancestors, though they had inspired prophets to direct their worship, of the baneful effect of these names; for they appeared before God to enter into his oath, adorned with the same meretricious ornaments. "Ye stand this day all of you before the Lord your God; your Captains of your tribes, your Elders, and your Officers, with all the men of Israel†." Nehemiah and his people fell into the same blunder. "And because of all this, we make a sure covenant, and write it, and our princes, Levites, and priests seal unto it—And the rest of the people, the priests, the Levites, the porters, the sing-

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* Letters on Covenant Oblig.

† Deut. xxix. 10.

ers, the Nethinims, they clave to their brethren, their nobles, and entered into a curse and into an oath to walk in God's law *."

But, besides the preservation of religion, and the uniformity of the British churches in doctrine, worship, discipline, and government, the Solemn League and Covenant was intended to secure the respective liberties of the three nations, and unite them in perpetual amity and peace. Thus far, it is acknowledged, it might be called a state oath; and for these secular purposes alone, it was administered by the civil power; and ordained to be sworn and subscribed by all the subjects, under the pain of being punished as enemies to religion, his Majesty's honour, and the peace of these kingdoms. With these proceedings of the State, we have no immediate concern; nor, have we any interest in the Solemn League, but as it is a religious covenant, obliging us to defend and promote the true religion, and to endeavour, by all scriptural means, to bring about uniformity in the faith and practice of the British churches.

2. "The whole matter of this covenant is so various and intricate, that the greater part of the common people who entered into it, could not be supposed to understand it."

To this objection we reply, with Mr Anderson, "That an oath is not to be blamed because persons may swear it rashly and ignorantly. An oath is sufficiently accommodated to the understanding of those who are desired to enter into it, if the terms have so much precision as not to be ambiguous; and so much clearness that any person of ordinary capacity, in the due use of the means he has access to, may come at their meaning.—But the terms of the Solemn League and Covenant are neither hard nor ambiguous. The hardest are the names of the ecclesiastical officers in the Episcopal communion: and why, will some say, are we obliged to acquaint ourselves with all the branches of Prelacy? We should be acquainted with public evils, so far as the knowledge of them is necessary for the keeping of ourselves unspotted from them, that we may not be partakers of them; as is necessary, in order to the exercise of gospel mourning and humiliation for them, as grounds of God's controversy with the land; as is necessary, in order to our testifying against them, for the glory of God, and for the benefit of our fellow men. On these accounts, a great part of God's word is taken up in pointing out public evils. On these accounts we should study to understand the terms alluded to in the Solemn League and Covenant.

Whoever is in the least acquainted with the history of this period, knows, that the public attention was then much engaged by the various branches of Prelacy; so that it is reasonable to suppose the several orders

* Neh. ix. 39. and x. 29, 29.

orders of the Episcopal hierarchy, and other things relating to that controversy, were better understood among the people than they are now.

But is it actually true that I do not so understand the things mentioned in an oath as to be able to swear it safely, till I have considered these things in all the lights wherein they can be considered, till I am able to explain each of them fully, and to solve all the doubts and difficulties that may be raised about them? For example, supposing I had a call in providence to assure the public, by an oath, of my loyalty to the British Government, and supposing the words, *British Government* to be in the form of the oath, would it be unlawful for me to swear it, till I comprehended fully the nature and maxims of that government; till I understood how exactly the three branches of the Legislature were balanced together; how privilege and prerogative went hand in hand; and, in fine, how easily every objection might be answered against the commonly received opinion, that it is the best constituted government in the known world? Suppose I were called to swear that I remember I was in my usual state of health at such a particular time; would it be wrong for me to take an oath to that purpose, with the word *health* in it, unless I could give an account of all the parts, external and internal, of my corporeal frame; unless I could tell of the solids and of the fluids; of the veins, arteries, nerves, muscles, tendons, and glands; of the motion of the heart and of the lungs; of the chyle, the blood, and some mysterious thing they call the animal spirits; and, in short, unless the word *health* suggested to me all the ideas which it ever suggested to a Sydenham, or a Boerhaave? If this is the case, I may turn Quaker when I please with regard to oaths; for it is impossible that, ever in this world, an oath can be devised that is not far beyond the reach of my understanding. Such is the egregious trifling which some have tried to pass upon the world, for sober solid reasoning, against our Covenants. The truth is, one understands the things mentioned in an oath sufficiently for the purpose of swearing that oath, if his knowledge of them answer the intention of the administrator. One may take an oath of loyalty to the British Government, though he knows no more of the British Government than that he lives securely under it, enjoying his liberty and his property. In like manner, one may take an oath renouncing Popery, Prelacy, and Arminianism; if he only knows a few of the tenets to which those names are commonly appropriated, and is convinced, in his conscience, that the tenets are contrary to the word of God. The divine truths opposite to Popery, Prelacy, and Arminianism, are such as every Christian ought to be acquainted with, as contained in the holy scriptures: and surely it

it requires very little historical knowledge to convince him that there is something contrary to those truths, in the religious opinions that go under the above-mentioned names. The truth is, a good and honest heart (that is, the new heart which God hath promised) is unspeakably more necessary for the right performance of this duty, than much of what passes among men for knowledge and penetration."

3. "The Solemn League and Covenant favoured persecution for conscience sake."

This serious and heavy charge is brought against the Second Article, and is founded upon the word Extirpation. But this word does not necessarily infer persecution; for it is used by our Saviour himself: "But he answered and said, Every plant which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up," or extirpated*. Popery, Prelacy, Superstition, Heresy, Schism, and Profaneness, are in the view of every sound Presbyterian, plants of this kind; and are to be rooted up from the garden of God. No sanguinary measure was intended by the Saviour, when he used the word extirpate; therefore, in imitation of him, the Church may use it with perfect propriety. Her weapons are not carnal, but spiritual; they are preaching, praying, and writing; and the edge of these powerful weapons can reach the heresy, while the life, liberty, and property of the heretic remain unhurt. These the Church did use in the work of extirpation, with singular success. That the heresy, not the heretic, was the real object of this Article, must be obvious to the most careless, or prejudiced reader; for if the Covenanters meant the heretic, it was as easy, and more natural, to mention the person than the opinion. But they have a right to be heard in their own vindication. Among the eminent Ministers who warmly recommended, from the pulpit, the extirpation of Prelacy, Baillie mentions Mr Samuel Rutherford; and yet, while Mr Rutherford earnestly preached in favour of that measure, he as publicly and solemnly laments the spoliation and imprisonment of heretics. This is a certain proof that he wanted to root out the heresy alone. The Scottish Commissioners to the Westminster Assembly, one of whom composed the draught of the Solemn League, which was accepted without any material alteration, in a paper of information sent to their friends at Paris, speak in the clearest terms of extirpating the Office.

"We present," said they, "to their wise considerations, That the covenant of Scotland rejects absolutely all kinds of Episcopacy: That the covenant of the three kingdoms, is expressly for rooting of all Prelacy, not the tyranny alone of that office: That the Royalists would
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* Mat. xv. 13.

“be well content to keep in any imaginable kind of Episcopacy, being assured, in their own time, to break in pieces, and rend all the coveats we can put on it; so it is necessary to hold to that ground, wherein all here do agree, and to which the Royalists themselves are on the point of yielding. That no Episcopacy here is tolerable, as being a mere human invention, without the word of God, which, wherever it lodged, has been a very unhappy guest. The total extirpation of it would be applauded and congratulated.” What language more appropriate could the Covenanters use in speaking of an office or opinion than this? To these testimonies, in favour of this article, may be added Mr Baillie’s solemn appeal to the omniscient God, concerning the rectitude of their public intentions, which the reader will find in the beginning of the section. But these were not the sentiments of individuals only, the Westminster Assembly, in their exhortation to the taking of the covenant which was approved of by both houses of Parliament, expressly declare—“Nor is any person hereby bound to offer any violence unto their persons.”

To extirpate, or root out, that which is contrary to the will of God, is a phrase used by Him whose name is holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners; and is written in his word for our learning and imitation. Are we to disregard His authority, and reject the expression as unfit to be used, because we find it in the solemn religious covenants of those, who held some opinions, and fell into some methods of defending the gospel, which its merciful Author expressly forbids? The whole word of God must, then, be rejected: for where is the man that can wipe his mouth and say that he is clean? Must the language of those men be condemned as assuredly wicked, because the conduct which seemed to flow from it was, in several instances, very reprehensible? If this be admitted, human language, both natural and artificial, must be laid aside, and all communication of thought suspended for ever; for there is not a natural sign, nor a word in any language, but has been followed by improper, corrupt, and wicked actions. “There is not a just man upon earth that doeth good and sinneth not.” When the language of a deed admits of more than one meaning; or when the conduct of its authors and supporters renders it ambiguous, we have a right to adopt and maintain that which appears to be agreeable to the dictates of scripture and reason. We may, with all safety, engage with our fathers, to root out, or extirpate, in our several stations, and to the utmost of our power, every doctrine and ordinance of human invention, with the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. To
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this we are solemnly bound, both by the Divine Law and the nature of a Christian profession.

“But this Extirpation,” it is strenuously contended, “was the work of the State : and the means competent to statesmen in extirpating error, are not spiritual, but carnal ; not the power of persuasion, but the sword, or authority.” “Now, how can a principle be extirpated by civil authority, without, at the same time, infringing on the liberty and rights of conscience of the person professing that principle, though otherwise a good member of civil society * ?”

To these objections we reply, That the conduct of the Church, though not separate, was distinct from the proceedings of the State : and, it is with the former, not with the latter, that we have any immediate concern. But, even the State may do much to extirpate certain heresies and modes of worship, without exercising a single act of persecution. It is well known that Popery and Prelacy cannot exist without immense revenues, and royal favour. Transplant these poisonous weeds into the barren soil of poverty and neglect, and they will quickly sicken and die. To extirpate them, the State has only to repeal the civil laws by which they are established, and withhold the revenues on which they fatten. Leave them to themselves, and they are half destroyed. It is no infringement of the rights of any man, to refuse your countenance and your money to the support of his wickedness or absurdity, though he were otherwise a good and peaceable member of civil society.

But, were the prelatical party, in those days, good members of society ? Ask the bloody Star-Chamber and High Commission, and they will tell you. Were the Independents intitled to this honourable character ? Ask the murdered Charles †, and the subverted liberties of Britain, and they will tell you. Whatever might be their principles, the conduct of both parties, for many years, justified the Covenanters in restraining them by the power of the civil magistrate. And are the Papists worthy of unrestrained freedom ;—they who, from time immemorial, have filled all Europe with mourning, and lamentation, and woe ? Every one who examines their Creed, the Decrees of the Council of Trent, will see that a number of their principles are destructive to every Protestant society : and whatever a few individuals in some Protestant countries have pretended to do, that they might mount again into the seat of power, those odious and sanguinary tenets, which have drunk the

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* Letters, &c.

† The death of Charles was murder, because whatever he deserved, he was tried by no existing law, nor by any lawful court.

the blood of millions, have never been renounced by their Church to this day. To restrain such men, (which our fathers certainly intended,) when they refused to turn from the error of their way, to refuse them admission into places of power and trust, to decline putting arms into their hands, are no more than measures of self-defence. To punish the seditions, insurrections, and massacres of any, but especially of these irreconcilable enemies to Protestant nations, is not persecution, but a just, reasonable, and necessary preservation of life and property. The thief and the robber are equally good and peaceable members of civil society as the Papist, when he acts according to his principles; and how well disposed he is to do this, whenever the opportunity offers, the sad experience of many generations abundantly proves. While the enemies of the Reformers cautiously pass by the habitual enormities of these parties, or touch them with the gentlest hand, they seize upon the least appearance of evil in the language and actions of Covenanters; they insist to understand their words and conduct in the very worst meaning; they magnify every mistake into a crime, and every crime into the foulest abomination.

But, the conduct of the Presbyterians will suffer nothing by a comparison with the proceedings of their opponents. The Papists and Episcopalians consigned, with remorseless barbarity, the conscientious Dissenter to a prison, to banishment, or death; in New England the Independents did the same; but the Parliament of England, when they abolished Prelacy and the ceremonies, provided for the support of such ministers as were removed from their places. No measure employed by the Presbyterians ever equalled the Bartholomew Bushel, the Corporation Act, or the Star-Chamber. By this comparison, it is not meant that the iniquitous acts of Presbyterians are either wiped away, or diminished, by the blacker crimes of their neighbours; but to give their bitter and partial adversaries an opportunity of learning a little candour and moderation. In one word, though we can never be bound to employ carnal weapons in the service of the Prince of peace, we are bound by the Solemn League and Covenant to endeavour the extirpation of moral evil in the faith and practice of the British churches, by all the means which are competent to church-members: and no mistaken views, nor unhallowed measures of original covenanters can set us free.

4. "The Solemn League and Covenant relates to the civil and political state of the three kingdoms."

It is now a prevailing sentiment, that secular and ordinary concerns should not be admitted into a religious covenant. In guarding against one extreme, it is not uncommon to run into another. Our fathers, perhaps,

perhaps, carried too much of this world into their covenants ; and we are for admitting too little. It is certainly not unlawful to have respect to worldly matters, in religious exercises. The Holy Spirit enjoins us to acknowledge the Lord in all our ways. It is our duty to pray about our secular concerns ; and why may we not also come under solemn engagements about them ? The Law of Christ binds us to all the duties of both tables ; to relative duties, as well as to the duties of religion. Therefore, a religious covenant may lawfully contain engagements to our natural and civil relatives, as well as to God and to the church. For no man will pretend that God requires in his word, what we cannot lawfully engage to perform. It is no less proper, when certain duties have been much neglected, or when the temptations to neglect them are many and powerful, that the covenanter should expressly engage to observe them. An example of this occurs in the days of Nehemiah. The restored captives, not satisfied with engaging to observe all the commandments of the Lord, swore particularly, to guard against the prevailing evils of their times.—“ And that we would not give our daughters unto the people of the land, nor take their daughters for our sons ; and if the people of the land bring ware, or any victuals, on the Sabbath-day to sell, that we would not buy it of them on the Sabbath, or on the holy day : and that we would leave the seventh year,* and the exaction of every debt *. The last article of this Bond, which is recorded in scripture for our learning, refers to the civil state of that people. The state of matters, at the time when the Solemn League was framed, rendered it peculiarly proper to insert an engagement to maintain their allegiance to the King, to perform their duty to their fellow-subjects, and to promote peace and unity between the two kingdoms ; for their temptations to neglect these duties were many and great, and the accusations of their enemies, charging them with acting undutifully in these respects, were loudly vociferated through all the countries of Europe.

But, the specification in the third article seems to be improper ; for though the scriptures require that every soul be subject to the government of his country in their lawful commands, they do not recognize any particular form of government. They know nothing about Parliaments, their rights, or their privileges ; and neither should a religious covenant. These political creations are among the proper subjects of civil contracts. Though civil concerns may be admitted into a religious covenant, political matters ought to be excluded ; because neither the New Testament dispensation nor any one of the forms used by

* Neh. x. 30, 31.

the church of Israel, at the renovation of her covenants, take the least notice of these things. "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them *."

5. The fourth article is condemned as contrary to the right of private judgment. There our ancestors, "engage to endeavour the discovery of all such as were incendiaries, malignants, or evil instruments, by hindering the reformation of religion, dividing the King from his people, or one of the kingdoms from another, or making any faction or parties among the people contrary to the League and Covenant."

This article refers to the peculiar circumstances of our covenanting fathers; and was binding on them alone. But, it does not seem to be indefensible. The general design of it seems to be included in the duty to which the Apostle exhorts us, "Now I beseech you brethren, mark them who cause divisions and offences, contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them." It is no man's duty to become a spy, one of the most detestable characters that human depravity has formed; yet, it is undoubtedly our duty to discover the real character and designs, as far as we know them, of every enemy to the Church or the State. Such discovery is always necessary for the welfare, and sometimes for preserving the very existence of society. It is necessary that every member of a society and his actions, as far as they affect the public interest, should appear in their true colours, and without any disguise, that the society may know its friends from its foes: and this is what our ancestors, in the article under consideration, promise their endeavours to accomplish †.

It did not threaten the peace of good and peaceable subjects who differed in their judgment and practice from the covenanted reformation. The persons whom it seems to have respected, were that restless and malignant party, who, not satisfied with living soberly and peaceably, were continually endeavouring, by secret conspiracies, to undermine, or by open violence, to overthrow, the just rights and privileges of their neighbours. That party, the authors of all the misery which their Sovereign and their country endured, by their pernicious counsels and fatal exertions, separated the King from his people, and inflamed them against one another, till reconciliation became impossible. Such conduct was a heinous crime committed against the peace and welfare of civil society, and an attempt to infringe the natural and religious liberties of mankind; and, therefore, well deserves to be condignly punished by the civil magistrate. These, and no other, seemed

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* *Is.* viii. 20.† *Anderson's Ess.* p. 253.

to be the persons whom the Covenanters engaged to discover. This was no more than these incendiaries deserved; it was a duty, which genuine loyalty dictates, to take away the wicked from before the King, that his throne may be established in righteousness; and it was the only refuge of the Covenanters from utter ruin. Was it the duty of our ancestors to allow a furious and implacable faction to cover themselves with crimes, to abuse their King, to embroil the people, and to rob them of their dearest rights, without associating in their defence? They had tried every pacific measure in vain; they had suffered long, and to no purpose, and were sinking still deeper into the gulph of misery without being able to see an end to their wrongs and their sufferings. Of this the preamble to the Solemn League is a proof.

“We have now at last, (after other means of supplication, remonstrance, protestations, and sufferings) for the preservation of ourselves and our religion from utter ruin and destruction, according to the commendable practice of these kingdoms in former times, and the example of God’s people in other nations, after mature deliberation, resolved and determined to enter into a mutual and Solemn League and Covenant.”

The design of this discovery is, that those who, by force or fraud, interrupted or endangered the free and peaceable exercise of the civil and religious rights of their neighbour, “might be brought to trial, and receive condign punishment, as the degree of their offences shall require or deserve.”

The crimes mentioned in this article, were punishable by the laws of the land; and the due execution of these just and necessary laws, our fathers, here, engaged to promote. It is the duty of every citizen to do the same. No society can exist without laws; and laws are useless, if they be not executed. Impressed with these plain dictates of reason, the Covenanters swore to discover the enemies of religion and liberty, that they might be known; that they might receive no countenance from the civil powers; and that they might be punished according to their deserts, if their enmity broke forth, as it frequently did, into open hostility. If our ancestors meant no more than this; if they intended only to secure their dearest rights to themselves, without forcing uniformity upon others; we are persuaded they did nothing worthy of blame:—nothing but what every people, in similar circumstances, ought to do. For, it is the duty of every person to use his utmost endeavours to preserve what ought to be dearer to him than life,—his religion and liberty. The law of nature requires him, when gentler measures fail, to impose all those restraints upon his neighbour, even to death itself, which

which are necessary to his preservation. Thus far our fathers might go, but no farther; and when, in principle or practice, they overstep this boundary, the writer ceases to plead their cause.

“But, this article,” it is said, “inflicts civil punishment upon the opposers of the Covenant; and this punishment is not confined to civil society, but extends to the opposers of the Reformation*.”

We have already shown, that part of this Covenant may be justly enforced with civil pains, at the same time that we pointed out the impropriety of its standing in a religious covenant. Upon looking into the fourth and fifth articles, we find, that the persons liable to punishment are not those who only declined engaging on the side of the Covenanters; but, the “wilful opposers” of religion and liberty; the “incendiaries, malignants, and evil instruments,” who, by secret plots, open seditions, and bloody rebellions, violently opposed the public peace, the propagation of the gospel, and the free and peaceable enjoyment of divine ordinances.

“But this punishment is not confined to civil society.” What then?—Are persons not to be defended in the exercise of their religious rights? Must the civil magistrate draw his sword in defence of men, as members of the civil state, but stand and look on, a passive spectator, when the same persons, exercising their religious rights, are violently interrupted, banished, or murdered! What right had the Papists and Episcopalians to insist upon the establishment of their system, under the horrors of the Star-Chamber and High Commission, or to wage open and destructive war against the Presbyterians for refusing to prostitute their consciences to the doctrines and commandments of men? And what right had the Independents to demand, (for they never would be satisfied with a negative toleration; nor so much as hear what concessions the Presbyterians would agree to;) what right had they to demand, that the Covenanters should grant them a Positive Toleration to that, which, in conscience, they believed to be morally wrong, on pain of involving their country in endless confusion, or of humbling it in the dust, under a yoke of galling and ignoble servitude?

* Letters, &c. p. 27.

C O N C L U S I O N.

THOUGH the forms which our fathers used are not without their faults, and though the administration of these Covenants be in some instances very reprehensible, yet, their lawfulness, and their obligation upon posterity, cannot be reasonably doubted. For our fathers practised the duty of covenanting according to the word of God; they avouched the Lord to be their God, and engaged to walk in his ways, and to keep his statutes; and they bound themselves and their posterity, to hold fast their attainments, and to carry on the work of reformation, which they had successfully begun. The view which we have taken of their proceedings incontrovertibly prove these things. The reformation of religion is the principal article in these covenants, to which all others, however important, are subservient. Religion is their chief scope and end. They bind the swearer to universal holiness, in faith and practice; to the persevering and diligent performance of every duty to God and man. Therefore we can find no solid reason to doubt of their obligation upon us. It is absurd and unscriptural, as has been shown, to imagine that any mistake in the faith, in the practice, or in the Forms, which the original Covenanters used, can annul the obligation of such articles. And, there is reason to fear, that the cavils and objections of many, arise from disaffection to the cause, rather than from the feverish regard which they profess to feel for the just rights of men. It is not easy to account for their conduct upon any other principle. Though the cause of reformation is quite different from the measures employed to maintain it; and though no argument can be drawn from the latter against the former; yet these they always confound; and, from some improprieties in the opinions and conduct of Covenanters, declaim against the cause itself. While they cast a veil over the atrocious conduct of their opponents, they magnify every mistake into an act of deliberate and desperate wickedness; every false step into an unpardonable crime; every act of undue severity into an instance of unprecedented cruelty. Many speak and write, concerning our renowned ancestors, as if, from the very beginning of their struggle for religion and liberty, they should have been perfectly free from human frailty and corruption. Is this doing to others, as we would have them do to us?

us? They speak as if every sinful action, at once, annihilated all that is holy, just, and good, in human conduct, and dissolved all engagements, however solemn and sacred, with which it might be connected. Were this just, there would be an end to religion, to liberty, and to security, in this world.

Our covenanting ancestors, however disinterested, wise, and religious, were not infallible. It belongs to man to err. And, accordingly, it fared, at times, with them, as with the best of sinful and imperfect men. They knew but in part; their proceedings were marked with imperfection; they were not able, at all times, to submit to their own principles, and to walk by their own rules. And, where is the man, where is that society, that is sufficient for these things? "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at them."

ADDRESS

A D D R E S S

TO THE

BRITISH CHURCHES.

INHABITANTS of the British Isles, you once, like Judah, rejoiced in the oath of God. The excellence of your public Confessions and Covenants shows what you once were. It was your honour soon to outstrip the churches of the Reformation in the career of holiness. In the heavens of the visible church, you shone as a star of the first magnitude. You seemed to be chosen as the peculiar treasure of the Lord Jesus; you were the joy of the whole reformed world; and you were the terror of the man of sin. But, how are you fallen! Your goodness has vanished as the morning cloud, and as the early dew. You have made yourselves as vile, as ever God made you glorious; have cast yourselves as low, as he raised you high; have been as profane, as ever you were holy. From the days of your fathers, you have been in a great trespass. The glorious work of reformation was no sooner completed, than a perjured band of cruel persecutors pulled it down again. They pretended to annul those covenants which our ancestors had so often sworn to the MOST HIGH GOD, as if they had a right to dispose of the prerogative of Heaven according to their pleasure. The most venerable Assemblies the Church of Scotland could ever boast, and their faithful contendings for the Truth, were condemned, with an impiety and insolence, perhaps unequalled in the history of human wickedness; the federal engagements of these nations, were committed, in the most ignominious manner, to the flames. Renouncing their allegiance to the Lord Jesus, your fathers made choice of a mortal, a cruel, and profligate persecutor, to be the Lord of their conscience. The sword of the murderer was drawn. Hundreds of martyrs perished under colour of law, and unnumbered multitudes were cruelly massacred, without the mockery of form, in the open fields, or, driven from their families and possessions, were compelled to seek their safety in exile, for no other reason, but because they would not renounce those sacred engagements which both they and their persecutors had ratified by their solemn

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oaths.

oaths. From fear, or choice, your fathers deserted the cause of God, and apostatized to Prelacy which they had abjured. They suffered their faithful ministers to be ejected; and they supported and countenanced the unfaithful majority, in their conformity with the times. Having rejected the oath of God, they submitted to a flood of sinful oaths, bonds, and declarations, by which they renounced and abjured their covenanted reformation, and recognized the usurped supremacy of a mortal over the church of Christ. As if they had studied to insult the God of truth and their former obligations, so often and awfully repeated, they exalted James the Seventh, an avowed and bigoted Papist, to the throne; and received, with expressions of gratitude and joy, from his absolute power, by which he suspended the laws of the land at his pleasure, a Positive; Boundless Toleration, which was plainly intended for the introduction of Popery and Slavery. When the arm of the Lord delivered us from civil bondage and Romish superstition, at the memorable Revolution 1688, our more immediate ancestors suffered every part of the Reformation, in the covenanting period, to be neglected, without one single effort to recover it; and all that Charles had done against it to remain untouched. These nations again renounced their federal engagements to the God of heaven, by the treaty of union in the year 1707, in which the preservation of the hierarchy and ceremonies, with other corruptions of the English Church, is made one of the fundamental articles. An endless repetition of oaths, a number of unlawful oaths, the sacramental Test, and a superstitious mode of swearing, by laying the hand upon, and kissing the gospels, quickly followed in the train of these evils, till, in the year 1712, a Positive Toleration of almost every mode of worship put the capstone upon the gloomy fabric of national iniquity. If the persecutions of the scribes and Pharisees, brought upon them "all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel, unto the blood of Zacharias," your supine indifference to these national iniquities, or your positive approbation of them, in like manner, exposes you to the punishment which these crimes deserve. For such heinous provocations, your judgment now, of a long time, lingers not. Because sentence against these evil works has not been executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men, is fully set in them to do evil. "But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness." Forbearance is not forgiveness. The Arm of God has long been lifted up; and the longer the stroke is delayed, it will descend with heavier vengeance

geance at last. Are not these judgments already begun, and advancing with alarming and accelerated rapidity? The incensed Avenger of broken covenants, soon visited these guilty nations in anger. He sent the devouring fire and the sweeping pestilence into those very places where our sacred Engagements were burnt, with such visible tokens of his wrath, as the most indifferent spectator could not but observe. The judgments of God upon the ring-leaders of this great rebellion, are too striking to be passed over in silence. The House of Stuart, drunk with the blood of innocents, and panting with insatiable thirst for more, became at last intolerable to the Nation, and were hurled from the throne of Britain into everlasting exile; an awful warning to the Persecutor of the Church, and the Oppressor of Men. Soon after the Revolution, the Lord rebuked our fathers with a grievous famine, of seven years duration; and threatened them and their posterity with the loss of Religion and Liberty, by two rebellions in favour of a Popish Pretender. The sword of civil and foreign war, has raged for almost a hundred years, with little intermission; and, in the bloody contests in which the Wrath of God has involved us, countless numbers of our fellow-subjects have fallen, and immense riches have been swallowed up. But what ought to alarm you more than all this is, the dreadful progress of spiritual judgments. A flood of gross and damnable errors has burst in upon us, which threatens the whole system of pure morality and genuine religion. Profanity and wickedness of every kind, run down our streets like a mighty stream; security and carelessness rapidly increase; a sense of God, and of duty, is wearing off the public mind. These things are not the querulous allegations of a gloomy individual; but are seen and lamented by the sober and reflecting of every class. You have forsaken the God of your fathers, and have renounced his oath; and you are losing, by degrees, even the advantages arising to civil society from religious obligation in general. Oaths, particularly those to the State, are accounted mere forms; and, in some cases, the breach of them has been apologized for, as consistent with virtue and honour. These are indubitable signs of the Divine displeasure; but they are not all you have to fear; if the mercy of God do not bring you to repentance, they are but the forerunners of heavier judgments.

“And I also have given you cleanness of teeth in all your cities, and want of bread in all your places, yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord. And also, I have withheld the rain from you, when there were yet three months to the harvest: and I caused it to rain upon one city, and caused it not to rain upon another city: one piece was rained

upon, and the piece whereupon it rained not, withered. So, two or three cities wandered unto one city to drink water, but they were not satisfied; yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord. I have smitten you with blasting and mildew; yet have ye not returned to me, saith the Lord. I have sent among you the pestilence, after the manner of Egypt; your young men have I slain with the sword, and have taken away your horses; and I have made the stink of your camps to come up unto your nostrils; yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord. I have overthrown some of you, as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and ye were as a firebrand plucked out of the burning; yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord. Therefore, thus will I do unto thee, O Israel: and because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel."

ADDRESS

A D D R E S S
TO THE
SECESSION CHURCH. ♦

FATHERS, BRETHREN, AND PRIVATE CHRISTIANS,

THE God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, in the richness of his mercy, put it into the hearts of our fathers, at the beginning of the Secession, to lift up their Testimony against the prevailing corruptions of the Church to which they belonged; filled them with dauntless resolution, with admirable wisdom, and inflexible perseverance; and animated their struggles with his gracious presence. Having pleaded with their mother in vain, they forsook a communion where they could no longer remain with a good conscience; and, following the path of duty, and the bright example of reforming churches, organized the Secession church, and unfurled a standard for the covenanted reformation and uniformity of these nations, which they displayed with integrity, firmness, and success. For the sake of that good cause, they cheerfully exposed themselves to contempt and scorn; to mockings and reproaches; to painfulness and watchfulness; to labours and fatigues; to the loss of all things; for their actions showed, that in resolution and purpose, they loved not their lives unto the death. These eminent and revered Confessors are gone to receive the reward of their faithful renderings, in the land of rest. Their immediate successors caught the mantle of their ascending fathers, and, like them, abounded in service and sufferings, for the sake of Christ and his church. They too, ruled with God, and were faithful with the saints. Israel "served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the Elders that out-lived Joshua, who had known all the works of the Lord that he had done for Israel." "And also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers; and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the Lord, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel." Only the gleanings of the second generation of Seceders are left, and like Isaac,

Isaac, behold now, they are old, and know not the day of their death. Have we no reason to fear that another generation is rising after them, which know not the Lord, nor yet the works which he hath done for our Israel? We are still the friends of the covenanted cause; we still hold the principles of our fathers: but have we no reason to complain, that it is not with us, as in times past? Hath not our love to God and to one another, have not the zeal and holiness which enlightened the conduct of the first Seceders, suffered a sad decline? Have we no careless, time-serving ministers amongst us; none that are disaffected to the cause they have sworn to support? Are there none who overlook or encourage those irregularities among their people, which are contrary to our profession, and their own engagements? Are we conscientious in teaching our people the peculiar principles of our public creed? What then mean their ignorance in these important matters, their disaffection and their silence?

It is but too obvious, that a desire of conformity in principle and practice to the times, which has ever been fatal to the church where it was suffered to prevail, is quenching the honourable Christian ambition of dwelling alone, and keeping our garments unspotted from the world, which so greatly distinguished our excellent fathers. But one of the strongest evidences of decline, is the marked disinclination which great numbers in our communion discover to the duty of Public Vows. If those in official stations are themselves averse to covenant renovation; if they are negligent to instruct their people in the nature and necessity of this duty, we need not wonder at the general reluctance. These are the beginnings of apostasy; and of these the most respectable in public and private life, are loudly complaining. But experience proves, that spiritual declension is as the letting out of water. Spiritual judgments, the sure signs of the Lord's displeasure, for the growing unfaithfulness of ministers and people, increase in number, and deeply affect us. These plagues the general Synod yearly enumerate and deplore in their acts for public fasting: but they are not suitably regarded. We ought to consider our ways ere it be too late; before the Lord, provoked by our iniquities, forsake us and return to his place. We must return to our first love, to our first works. If we would not run with the multitude to do evil, and at last share in their punishment, we must break off our sins by righteousness; we must provoke one another to love and to good works; we must double our diligence, in our respective stations, to keep the commandments of God, to observe his ordinances, and hearken to his voice. It is our duty to study
with

with diligence and care, to understand, to love, and to prosecute with vigour, the cause in which we are engaged. The voice of duty and of interest, call upon us to hold fast our attainments, and go on to perfection. Look around upon the churches of the Reformation, and especially upon the Church of Scotland, which cast out your fathers for their integrity, and take warning. Their present enormous corruption began with disinclination to the cause of God, and the desire of pleasing a sinful world. If these poisonous weeds are already rooted in our vineyard, we must tear them up and cast them away, by a believing improvement of all divine ordinances, and especially by renewing our Solemn Covenants. These were the means by which the Church of Scotland recovered her purity, and rose to such eminence in the first periods of the Reformation. By the same means have we been delivered from a corrupt and dangerous communion, and preserved to this day: and by no other, can we reasonably hope, by the blessing of God, to restore and preserve the life and power of religion, and guard against the sins and desolations of other churches. "Though thou Israel play the harlot, yet let not Judah offend." "Come and let us return unto the the Lord: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up. After two days will he revive us, in the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight. Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord, his going forth is prepared as the morning; and he shall come unto us as the rain; as the latter and former rain unto the earth *."

* Ho. vi. 1—3.

THE END.

[Printed by T. Ross & Sons, Bell's Wynd, Edinburgh.]

